

SECRETS — OF — MODERN CHESS STRATEGY

Advances since Nimzowitsch

John Watson



Winner of the 1999 USCF Fred Cramer Award for
Best Chess Book
Winner of the 1999 British Chess Federation
Book of the Year Award

Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy

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John Watson

GAMBIT

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Symbols

+	check
++	double check
#	checkmate
x	capture
!!	brilliant move
!	good move
!?	interesting move
?!	dubious move
?	bad move
??	blunder
Ch	championship
1-0	the game ends in a win for White
$\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$	the game ends in a draw
0-1	the game ends in a win for Black
(D)	see next diagram

Dedication

To Tal Shaked and Patrick Hummel, students who are gradually teaching me about chess

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Graham Burgess and John Nunn, for their suggestions and patience, and to the folks at ChessBase, who supplied me with never-ending data. I am also grateful to IM Larry D Evans, for both his friendship and the use of his fine library.

Introduction

In *Chessman Comics #2*¹, Chessman and Zugzwang are seen watching the chess western movie “Fort Blunder”, starring General Principle and Chief Alternative, in which the following dialogue takes place between the General and his assistant: “General Principle, sir, you’ve almost killed off them Old Indians!”; “Yup, but I fear there are new Indian formations coming!”. At the time of Nimzowitsch, the world of chess was undergoing major transformations which would indeed challenge the general principles then dominating chess theory. In fact, these changes, most apparent in the new Indian formations championed by Nimzowitsch himself, ultimately cast into doubt the very validity of having such things as ‘general principles’ at all. Nimzowitsch challenged older theory, and his successors ushered in an era of pragmatism, rejection of dogmatism, and analytical research which still characterizes chess today. My task in this book has been to identify the most important changes in chess theory which distinguish modern from classical chess thought.

Right away, since I am aware how daunting this book may seem to the reader, I want to make some organizational and philosophic points. First, defining what is ‘modern’ in chess has been a tricky task; as a general guideline, I have chosen 1935, the year of Nimzowitsch’s death, as a dividing point between modern and pre-modern play. Of course, there was no revolution in chess thought during that particular year; so ideas which I characterize as ‘modern’ were not necessarily unheard of before 1935, and naturally, some of the concepts I will emphasize have only recently entered the general consciousness. But when the reader is confused as to why I am designating an idea as ‘modern’ or ‘classical’, he or she is advised to take this somewhat arbitrary dividing point as a guide.

Unfortunately, the structure of this book is a bit tricky, and I hope the reader will forgive me if I make repeated explanations about it. Part 1 is designed to make the student feel comfortable with classical theory and with Nimzowitsch’s revisions to that theory. It seemed only fair to the average chess fan to explain a bit about older theory and to lay some foundation for later claims of radical change. But Part 1 also opens the subject of the modern ‘evolution’ of the older theory. Although the distinction is a bit arbitrary, I have introduced in Part 1 what could be termed ‘natural’ developments of older theory, whereas Part 2 is devoted to ‘revolutionary’ changes, for example, ones which refute older principles or involve fundamental philosophical changes. Thus, both parts fulfil the mandate of the book’s subtitle (‘Advances Since Nimzowitsch’); but Part 2 covers, with a minimal review of past thought, the new ideas which radically distinguish modern play. Hopefully, the chapter and section introductions will help the reader to make sense of these distinctions. At the risk of becoming tedious, I will repeat and expand upon what I have just said about the organization of this book in the first chapter of Part 1, and then again, to a lesser extent, in the first chapter of Part 2.

Next, I want to discuss my stylistic approach to this book, including the use of statistics and my choice of exemplary material. The first point to make is that this is *not* an instructional book. While I would hope and assume that its study can only help one as a player, that is not its primary purpose. Nor am I writing a complete guide to chess middlegame theory, in the way that well-known books written by Pachman or Euwe and Kramer have done. The book before you is a sort of middlegame book, with numerous examples from opening theory, since the opening and middlegame are no longer

1 The author referring to his own *oeuvre*! *Chessman Comics #2*; Watson & Myreng; Chess Enterprises Inc., 1982.

functionally separable. Within that context, however, I am concerned with a large but limited set of topics I find relevant to my thesis of advances in modern chess. So, for example, if the reader looks for a section about "Open Files as a Factor in an Attack against the King" (Pachman), I may have said absolutely nothing about the subject. There is also little of a 'how to play' variety here. My goal has been to investigate theoretical issues, not, for example, how to handle time-pressure or prepare for the next tournament. The exciting reality is that there is enough material and food for thought to write a book twice this long without deviating from chess ideas themselves.

From time to time throughout both Parts, I have referred to statistical analysis I have run on some issue (the frequency of appearance of a certain pawn structure, for example, or the winning percentages of Black in the Sicilian Defence). In every case, this was done using the ChessBase database program. Although I have not always indicated the size or scope of the searches done, I have tried to make each search as unambiguous and statistically significant as possible. But interpretations of such data may certainly vary, and the reader might have fun doing his own research on such topics, especially since there are more subtle distinctions to be gleaned by so doing. For the first time, I think, certain ancient issues are subject to at least partial solution by using this type of analysis. As my ever-astute editor Graham Burgess points out, however, the use of such statistics leads to unavoidable ambiguities. Suppose, for example, that you examine a large set of endings to decide whether queen and knight are superior to queen and bishop. If players already feel that the queen and knight are superior, they may tend to convert superior positions into that presumably safest of advantageous endings. The resulting win-loss percentages will then be skewed in favour of the queen and knight, since they will reflect perception as well as reality. While I could do nothing about such effects, I did take care to examine not just statistics, but concrete examples whenever making a statistical claim. To cut a long story short, I feel that my tentative conclusions are largely correct in spite of this problem; and in the most controversial cases (such as ♖+♘ vs ♖+♙), any

skewing would tend to favour the side I'm arguing against (in this case, the side with queen-and-knight), and thus its correction would only strengthen my argument. If that last sentence is confusing, just keep in mind the drift of this discussion when you come across statistical arguments!

The most difficult part of writing this book has involved the choice of what examples to use. At first, I wanted to avoid the re-use of the same classic examples which middlegame and instructional books have tended to beat into the ground. Experienced readers will know which ones I mean. On the other hand, it would be sheer arrogance to ignore what the many wonderful writers on middlegame topics have said about the issues I am dealing with. Ultimately, I reviewed and took notes on a wide array of books, mostly theoretical works, instructional books, and games collections. Many of these are indicated in the bibliography. I used more examples from these than I had originally intended, in part because of the wisdom imparted by their authors, but also because I discovered a number of new aspects to these examples (including errors and mistaken assessments) which I felt clarified my arguments about the differences we see in modern chess. Then, as will be particularly evident in Part 2, I used database searches to find fresh examples of games with modern ideas which range from routine to path-breaking. Since many of these modern examples might seem a little bizarre to the less experienced reader, their juxtaposition with well-known examples and with fairly nondescript exemplary positions will hopefully put one more at ease while exploring the new concepts. Another general issue which I'm sure will arouse comment concerns the relative chess understanding of classical and modern players. The reader should understand that my own early chess education was almost entirely filled by the study of the games of players before 1930; and the very first thing I did in preparing for this book was to play over and critically examine hundreds of games by the old masters, as well as to read the classic texts and tournament books. Although I seldom explicitly address the subject, it will be obvious that I consider modern players to have a broader and more subtle understanding of the

game than their predecessors. Normally, this would go without saying, and it in no way denigrates the great old masters, much as it hardly undercuts Bill Tilden's achievements in tennis to state that Andre Agassi would dominate him in a match, or Newton's work in physics to say that he failed to invent relativity theory. But there is so much emotion invested in the veneration of the old champions that I want to emphasize my respect for their play, and also how irrelevant I consider the direct comparison between champions of vastly different eras. The point of the book is to show what has changed

in modern chess, not to make negative judgments about individual players.

Finally, I need to remind the reader that there is no way of 'proving' the various claims I make about modern play. I can show examples, of course, but in the end, I will undoubtedly over- or under-estimate the importance of various ideas. This book will be most meaningful if one keeps a careful eye out to assess whether the theories presented here have a solid empirical basis in one's own study and play. I hope that my book will at least influence you to do so, and to think freshly about modern chess.

John Watson
Carlsbad, CA; 1998

Part 1: The Refinement of Traditional Theory

1 Overview

The Nature of Middlegame Theory

Chess is traditionally divided into three phases: opening, middlegame, and endgame. Throughout chess history, but especially in the last four decades, opening theory has expanded steadily. Of late, this expansion has become a sort of explosion, and we are inundated with almost unlimited material on this phase of the game, from books to magazines to databases. Endgame theory, while never an area of intense popular interest, has always inspired a flow of high-quality books and articles, if only because the ending is so well-suited to definitive conclusions and strict analysis.

But what of middlegame theory? Players wishing to study this area of the game have a limited and rather unsatisfactory range of resources from which to choose. Rather than address this phase of play in a theoretical sense, books tend to focus on more popular and tractable topics such as combinations, attack and defence, how to improve one's thinking, and general advice for the competitor. In contrast to the opening and endgame, areas in which players normally turn to a contemporary work for enlightenment, many if not most students still read the classics when it comes to middlegame theory. How many of us learned our general middlegame principles from, say, Lasker and Nimzowitsch, or from the newer, but hardly contemporary, works of Euwe and Kramer, Romanovsky, or Pachman? In the United States, to this day, the most popular of these traditional sources is Nimzowitsch's *My System*, a book written in 1925! However brilliant, readable, and ahead-of-its-time that book is (and it is all

those things), one has to wonder that we don't have any number of more advanced and updated works of its kind. Has the theory of the middlegame gone nowhere in the last 68 years?

Despite its appearance, that is not just a rhetorical question, and it requires a bit of thought to answer. On the one hand, this book will try to show that the state of modern chess theory is indeed dramatically different from the state of theory at the time of Nimzowitsch. On the other hand, it is extremely difficult to codify that difference in the way that chess theory has traditionally been presented, that is, with general rules, principles, or philosophic statements. We are all familiar with the kind of rules to which I am referring, ones which are purportedly useful if not strictly accurate, e.g., move each piece once in the opening, develop knights before bishops, pawns are strongest abreast, rooks belong behind passed pawns, don't put knights on the edge of the board, two bishops constitute an advantage, don't move pawns in front of your king, refrain from pawn-hunting when undeveloped, and so many others. Then there are 'principles' of positional play, which are often descriptions of the advantages or disadvantages of various elements of play, e.g., bad bishops, backward pawns, knight outposts, centralized pieces, doubled pawn complexes, pawn-chains, and countless other considerations to which we will return in the course of this book.

I will now risk a statement that is at least in spirit, if not literally, true: *This type of 'rule-oriented' and 'principle-oriented' theory was worked out or at least substantially understood by the time of Nimzowitsch's death in 1935.* To put that a little differently, the rules and principles which could be clearly stated and still have

prospects of applying to practical play with general usefulness had already been enunciated and internalized by the world's best players by 1935. Let's assume that this proposition is true for the moment. Wouldn't it explain the lack of later works which posit a whole new set of principles and rules, reflecting the discoveries of later generations? But here's where things get tricky. Anyone who reads a great deal of chess literature will be familiar with a related point of view, which goes something like this: 'Oh yes, all the fundamental principles were known by the great Old Masters. Modern chess consists of applying them to an increasing number of specific positions, along with a massive increase in opening theory.' One might even add: of 'mere' opening theory, for many with this attitude make the familiar claim that if you simply gave, say, Lasker or Capablanca some time to 'catch up' with modern opening theory, they would immediately be challengers for the world title.

I completely disagree with this point of view, and I don't believe it follows from my italicized statement above at all. Furthermore, it misses the point. While modern chess theory has advanced tremendously since the time of the early masters, it hasn't advanced in a simplistic, rule-based fashion. In fact, to emphasize this, Part 2 of this book will begin its examination of modern chess with a whole chapter emphasizing its 'rule-independent' nature. But is modern chess therefore somehow less 'principled' than that of older times? There are several ways of answering this question. The first, least disturbing, answer was expressed by Richard Réti in his magnificent classic *Modern Ideas in Chess*, when he was describing the modern style:

"What is really a rule of chess? Surely not a rule arrived at with mathematical precision, but rather an attempt to formulate a method of winning in a given position or of reaching an ultimate object, and to apply that method to similar positions. As, however, no two positions are quite alike, the so-called rule, if applied to an apparently similar position, may possibly be wrong, or at least as regards that particular position, there may exist a more suitable or effectual method of play. *It is the aim of the modern school not to treat every position according to one general law, but according to the principle*

inherent in the position. An acquaintance with other positions and the rules applicable to the treatment thereof is of great use for the purpose of analysing and obtaining a grasp of the particular position under consideration ... the source of the greatest errors is to be found in those moves that are made merely according to rule and not based on the individual plan or thought of the player." [italics mine]

This eloquent exposition contains the relatively benign notion that in chess, general rules will never have universal application, and the rather more daring one that each position has a principle inherent in it. That insight is closely related to another fundamental tendency of modern chess: the increasing reliance on concrete analysis. That phrase ('concrete analysis') has been a favourite of a whole series of leading players and theoreticians from what was often called 'The Soviet School of Chess'. Whether they formed such a 'school' or not can be argued, and of course, they claimed a variety of philosophic tenets. But the unifying claim which most clearly distinguishes the post-war generation of dominant players was the rejection of dogma and primacy of concrete analysis over abstract evaluation. Or, stated slightly differently, the replacement of general rules by an emphasis on the characteristics and consequences of the position at hand. In this respect, it is interesting to consider the recent books of super-trainer GM Mark Dvoretsky, which are making a huge impression on the European and American chess worlds. Among the many ideas and practical techniques he presents in his books, a powerful and consistent theme (and interestingly, the one singled out for praise by Kasparov) is the value of 'the analytic approach', which assigns paramount value to actual analysis. It would be hard to think of a modern world-class player who does not take this approach.

There is another way to answer the question 'Is modern chess less principled?'. A more radical response is to say that there are, indeed, a great number of new principles and even 'rules' *implicit* in modern play. But these principles and rules have not been explicitly stated; or in a very few cases, they have been stated, but not in a way that has infiltrated the conscious thinking of contemporary players. The reasons for this

lack of exposition are quite simple: the subtlety and complexity of such new principles would tend to require pages of painstakingly qualified prose for them to be adequately described, and it is both more natural and efficient for players to simply internalize this type of 'rule' during the over-the-board solution of hundreds of relevant positions. In fact, it may be said of any chess rule that the concrete experience of an individual player gives him a more accurate and subtle understanding of its application than any conceivable verbal statement could.

Regardless of which of these two apparently opposing models we prefer, the days of easily expressible general guidelines are over. Thus, there is very little possibility that players or researchers will ever undertake to extend the project begun by Steinitz, Tarrasch, and Nimzowitsch, that is, the codification of chess principles on a large scale. Ironically, although chess students are always warned to see the big picture rather than get lost in a morass of variations, the reality is that the modern player derives his *perspective and intuition* from the detailed analysis of great numbers of positions. When you combine this fact with the growing irrelevance of so many of the classical rules, it is hardly surprising that writers are reluctant even to address the subject of modern principles, preferring to give examples of modern play which they deem typical.

Methodology

In light of the above, the very attempt to elucidate modern chess in general terms may seem old-fashioned and misguided. And yet, our modern literature of games collections, annotated games, and magazine articles reveals a large pool of profound and revealing comments by strong players about new and subtle ways of thinking about the game. Even more powerfully, their games themselves speak to us. It is still possible to discover general wisdom in the mass of modern practice; we simply have to realize that the new ideas will be more qualified and specific than the bold and often discredited generalities of former times. Furthermore, there is a dynamic interconnectedness in chess which needs be taken into account; thus, modern guidelines will often have more to do with

techniques, sequences and procedures than with static rules.

To address such a complex subject, I have chosen to divide my discussion into two rather arbitrary parts. Part 1 of this book will review classical theory, and examine how certain traditional theoretical issues have been resolved or transformed in modern chess. The advances discussed will be in the broader sense 'evolutionary'; we want to see what revisions and extensions of older theory can be described without scrapping old models or resorting to a new and potentially burdensome vocabulary. Part 2 tries to address the more 'revolutionary' ideas of the modern age. Many of these ideas involve the complete rejection of older rules, rather than their mere revision. Naturally, this distinction is rather arbitrary, and an overlapping of topics is inevitable; just for example, the treatment of doubled and tripled pawns in Part 1, Chapter 4, could probably have fitted into Part 2 as well. While on the subject of how 'revolutionary' a chess idea is, it might be useful to consider the historical role of Nimzowitsch's work. If one reviews the writings of Steinitz and Tarrasch, and games ranging from those of the nineteenth-century masters to Nimzowitsch's contemporaries, one can make the case that almost everything explicated and categorized in *My System* can be found in the previous literature and games. On top of that, Nimzowitsch's own games are often unconvincing evidence for his own principles; one could argue (and it has been said) that Nimzowitsch more often won his games by superior calculation and even trickery than by application of his principles. But the enormity of his achievement resides in something else entirely; it is in transforming the underlying, implicit principles of the chess played up to his time into an explicit, conscious part of modern chess-players' thought. Steinitz had done this with certain concepts such as the bishop-pair, pawn weaknesses, queenside majority, and other positional principles and techniques. Nimzowitsch either invented or brought into general use fundamental concepts such as the blockade, seventh rank, outposts, prophylaxis, the treatment of pawn-chains and doubled pawns, and many others. The fact that other chess-players had utilized such concepts in

their games (or for that matter, played various hypermodern openings) is hardly relevant, since they did so for the most part randomly and unsystematically.

Likewise, just about any 'modern' chess idea expounded upon in this book can be found in some game or other prior to 1935; but these ideas had not become the conscious (and everyday) property of the world's leading players. To give a simple example (only because it is more easily stated in a few words than most of the ideas we will be dealing with), the sacrifice of the exchange obviously occurred well before the Soviet masters took a particular liking to it in the 1940s and 1950s; but it was neither a frequent occurrence nor a part of the chess consciousness of the times. Similarly, the notion of attacking pawn-chains at the front of the chain (and not at the base) certainly occurred prior to modern times; but it is now a conscious part of the chess-player's arsenal, and is employed in certain familiar and well-defined contexts. Other changes are more general, for example new ideas about time and development, dynamism, modern prophylaxis, and such things. I

would contend that such advances are meaningful and real, despite the difficulty in describing them.

Beginning with the next chapter, then, our task in Part 1 will be to present sketches of older theory and to show what has changed, while remaining in the context of the old formulations. I will try to do this by following, to some extent, the order of exposition in Nimzowitsch's *My System*. Furthermore, I will try to consider what Nimzowitsch himself said about a particular area first, before addressing what others before and after him thought. This is primarily a stylistic device, and due to the limited relevance of a number of topics in *My System*, it will be only a general guideline. It is important to remember that, since the subjects addressed are ones connected with particular new ideas in modern chess, this book is by no means comprehensive. The reader should not expect a primer or general work on positional chess; but rather, an exposition of certain topics which illustrate the advances of modern theory.

Without further ado, then, let's turn to the chess itself!

2 The Centre and Development

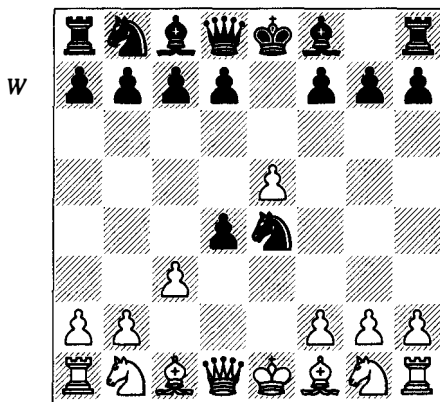
Any discussion of positional strategy must take into account issues of the centre. Consequently, this whole book will be concerned with conceptions of the centre and its treatment. But middlegame books like to emphasize certain elementary aspects of the centre in isolation. One example is the occupation of the centre by pawns and the potential for a central pawn advance. Another is the value of quick development and centralized pieces. Let's first take a look at what Nimzowitsch said about these topics, and then relate that to some modern issues.

The Centre and Tempi

In *My System*, Nimzowitsch begins with a chapter called 'On the Centre and Development'. It is important to realize that the beginning of his book is to some extent an introduction to chess. It therefore includes a number of elementary 'rules' for the student, some of which Nimzowitsch himself did not adhere to. These rules, however, are reflective of the chess theory of his time, and thus of interest to us. In Part 2 of *My System*, Nimzowitsch's introductory chapter ('The Conception of Position Play and the Problem of the Centre') revisits the issues of centre and development in a more sophisticated fashion.

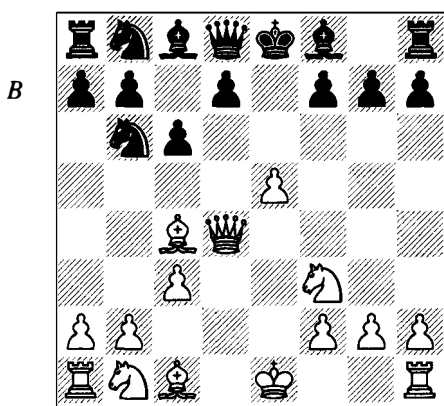
To begin with, Nimzowitsch addresses the traditional issue of using the centre to gain time. It is perhaps characteristic that this great hypermodern, with no special love of space or aggressive central pawn-masses, seems amusingly uncomfortable with the classical virtues of the centre. In Chapter 1, he imparts a curious lesson, beginning with the moves 1 e4 e5 2 d4 exd4 3 c3 ♘f6! 4 e5 ♗e4 (D). The knight on e4, he says, "can maintain himself here, for 5 ♙d3 will be answered by 5...d5. Not, of course, a further wandering by 5...♗c5?, for after this move, 6 cxd4 ♗xd3+ 7 ♖xd3 would yield an advantage of four tempi to White."

This last variation is peculiar. Four tempi or not, 7...d5! leaves Black with two bishops and a



healthy share of the centre (and it is White's 'good' bishop which has just been devoured). Most players would be quite content here as Black. (In fact, 5 ♗e2! is usually recommended instead of 5 ♙d3, but that is just a detail).

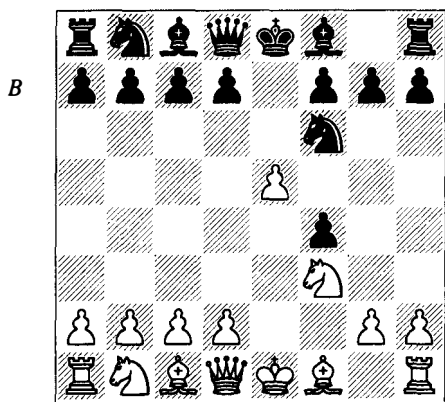
Nimzowitsch continues: "On the other hand, after 1 e4 e5 2 d4 exd4 3 c3 ♘f6! 4 e5, it would not be advantageous to move the knight to d5, for the poor beast would not find any rest there: 4...♗d5? 5 ♖xd4 c6 6 ♙c4 ♗b6 7 ♘f3 (D).



"White has six tempi as against two or one and a half, for the knight is not better placed at b6 than f6, and the move ...c6 is not really a whole tempo, since no move of a central pawn is here in question."

This assessment is really egregious. Where have those valuable tempi gone after 7...♖xc4 8 ♜xc4 d5, again with the two bishops, and with Black about to catch up in the number of minor pieces developed? Indeed, in order not to be worse, White had better try 9 exd6 ♙xd6 10 ♙g5, when Black can equalize by either 10...♙e7 or 10...♜c7 11 ♜e4+ ♙e6 12 ♘d4 0-0! 13 ♖xe6 ♜e8, etc.

This unfortunate start to one of the most brilliant chess books ever written dovetails nicely with one of the main themes of the current work. In chess, I will contend, our judgement is dulled by the use of artificial rules. Independence from such rules, moreover, is a crucial characteristic of modern chess thought. In the case before us, Nimzowitsch is caught counting tempi, utilizing the type of 'arithmetical' conception of the game of which he himself was derisive. In fact, a highly qualitative view of development, disregarding facile principles, permeates his actual play. In this context, the very next example in *My System* is noteworthy. It begins with a King's Gambit: 1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 ♖f3 ♖f6 4 e5 (D).



Nimzowitsch explains: "here is an exceptional case where the square h5 is a satisfying one (as a rule, border squares are not favourable for knights), e.g., 4...♘h5 5 d4 d5 (or 5...d6) ..., and Black does not stand badly."

What he says is quite true; but it is a funny example for someone trying to teach about the classical centre! Rather, we have the beginnings of a modern view of play. Above all, the typical modern master has a pragmatic view of things: instead of counting tempi or worrying

about whether knights belong on the rim in the abstract, he concentrates on what works. This will be a theme throughout our investigation, and is particularly expanded upon in Part 2. Along the lines of 4...♘h5, pragmatic knight moves to the edge of the board are abundant in modern chess, a rather amusing example being the current grandmasterly attention being given to the move 5 ♖a4!? after 1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 d5 4 cxd5 ♖xd5. That may seem a bit strange, but more reliable examples will be found in Part 2, Chapter 5 ('The Contemporary Knight').

How did Nimzowitsch view the relationship between pawn moves and development? Here are two of his pronouncements (still from the more elementary portion of his book):

"In the open game, speed of development is the very first law. Every piece must be developed in one move. Every pawn move is to be regarded as loss of time, unless it helps to build or support the centre or attack the enemy's centre. Hence, as Lasker truly observes: in the opening, one or two pawn moves, not more.

"...it follows that moves of the flank pawns must be regarded as a loss of time – with this qualification, that in closed games the rule applies to only a limited extent, since contact with the enemy is not complete..."

The modern view of these matters is quite different, of course. Whether in closed, semi-open, or open positions, flank pawn moves are regularly employed for a variety of reasons, e.g., the establishment of space, the discouragement of castling by the opponent, or the launching of a minority attack. Pieces are moved any number of times, if necessary, to achieve strategic goals. And the number of pawn moves in the opening can range from one to eight or more, depending upon the requirements of the position.

Even in the traditional 'open games' (a designation for games beginning with 1 e4 e5), completing one's development can be superseded by a number of prophylactic pawn moves, as well as by pawn moves which are necessary to establish structural advantages. In the revitalized Scotch Game, for example, White seemingly neglects development in several lines, such as 1 e4 e5 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 d4 exd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖f6 5 ♖xc6 bxc6 6 e5 (to establish

Back to pawn moves. Now White's kingside pawns are immobilized.

12 ♖e2

White later discovered ideas like 12 g4!? hxg3 13 h4, intending h5, to open lines for his bishops, with unclear prospects.

12...♟e7 13 ♖c1 ♜f5 14 ♙f2 a5 15 c3 c5

The ninth pawn move out of 15! This not only pressures d4, but in some cases, it sets up ...a4-a3 and ...c4, or a traditional pawn-storm by ...c4 and ...b5-b4. These ideas might have got us to something like 13 pawn moves out of 19; but White ruins our fun with his next move:

16 dxc5 ♙xc5 17 ♖d3 ♙xf2 18 ♗xf2 ♗xf2 19 ♖xf2 g5!

With the collapse of White's pawn-chain, Black obtains a clear advantage.

20 ♙b5 gxf4 21 ♖d3 0-0-0 22 ♙xd7+ ♗xd7 23 ♖xf4 ♟e7

From a 1992 game Manion-Norwood. White simply has to stand by while Black plays ...♗h8-g5, ...♗c8, ...b5, and at the appropriate moment, ...♟g3-e4, surrounding the e-pawn and creating too many threats. The lesson: there may be games in which one should make only two pawn moves and develop a new piece with every move, but there are so many 'exceptions' that to take such a guideline to heart would merely limit one's strength as a player. To wrap up this section, here's an amusing example to show how White can flaunt the rules as well: Kosten-Lucas, Tours 1996: 1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 d6 3 ♖c3 e5 4 ♜f3 e4 5 ♙g5 ♙f5 6 g3!? h6 7 ♖h3 c6 8 ♜f4 ♖bd7 9 ♟g2! d5 10 ♖e3. At this point, White has moved his king's knight six times in the first ten moves, but as Kosten says, White appears to have a small advantage anyway! He has good pressure on the centre, and can play for ♙g2, 0-0, and f3 with a positional edge. While this is admittedly on the extreme side, modern players increasingly discover positions in which structure takes precedence over development, especially when the meaning of the latter term is limited by rules such as 'move each piece only once in the opening'.

Pawn-Grabbing in the Opening

About this topic, Nimzowitsch says: "What, therefore, the inexperienced player, young or old, must take to heart is the commandment:

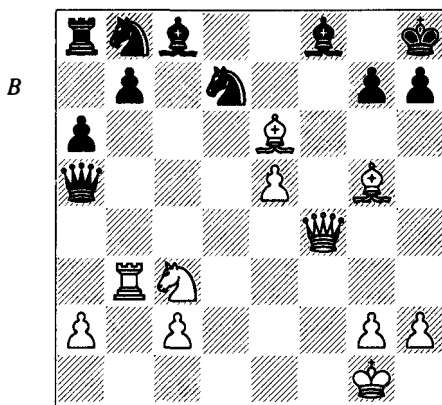
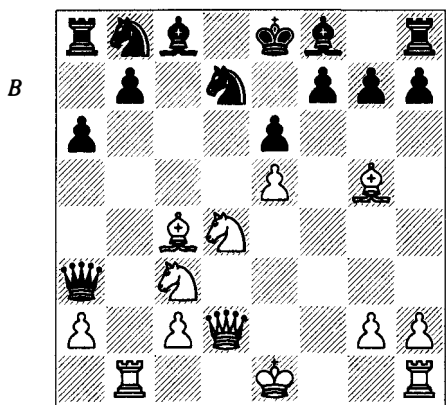
Never play to win a pawn while your development is as yet unfinished!" He then goes on to give this exception: "A centre pawn should always be taken if this can be done without too great danger ... for thus you will get the possibility of expansion at the very spot around which in the opening stages the fight usually sways, namely the centre."

Once again, this advice is explicitly directed to the amateur. And yet, leading chess masters during Nimzowitsch's time (say, from 1910 to 1935) were disinclined to go hunting for pawns in the opening. Here, too, the modern view is distinctly more liberal. Centre pawns are still captured when possible, but flank pawn raids are also common from the outset of the game. Let's see if we can understand why. In the first place, the capture of a flank pawn often involves more than the mere trade of material for time and development. Frequently, the disappearance of a flank pawn undermines the gambiteer's interior defences, or it can allow a cramping spatial advantage for the grabber, since his pawns may advance on the same side of board with less resistance.

This is best explained by examples. Beginning with a very famous and complex one, let's consider the so-called 'Poisoned Pawn' line of the Sicilian Defence, Najdorf Variation: 1 e4 c5 2 ♜f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♜xd4 ♜f6 5 ♖c3 a6 6 ♙g5 e6 7 f4 ♗b6 8 ♗d2 ♗xb2 9 ♖b1 ♗a3.

This variation is so established that we forget how utterly bizarre and suicidal the idea of grabbing White's b-pawn once looked. Black has only the f6-knight developed, and even it is subject to attack by e5. What's more, the queen on a3 will surely lose even more time retreating from attack by the white pieces. Consider the now nearly-forgotten line 10 e5 dxe5 11 fxe5 ♜fd7 12 ♙c4 (D).

In the 1950s and early 1960s, White won a series of brilliant miniatures from this position. After all, he has six very active pieces out versus Black's lone knight and queen, the latter of which is about to lose more time to ♗b3 or even to some ♟b5 shot. Worse still, after 0-0, taking over the open f-file, sacrifices on e6 and f7 appear too dangerous for Black to even contemplate allowing. All for one pawn, and for a cramped position in which mate can come from almost any direction (as the continuation



12...Qxe5? 13 Qxe6!, leading to a quick denouement, shows).

Referring to this Poisoned Pawn Variation (after 8...Wxb2), the brilliant, classically-oriented grandmaster Salo Flohr commented, even as late as 1972: "In chess, there is an old rule: in the opening, one must make haste to develop the pieces, and must not move the same piece several times, particularly the queen. This ancient law holds good even for Bobby Fischer." Note that Flohr speaks of 'rules' and 'laws', which are precisely the constructs the modern player increasingly rejects. This variation is a perfect example, especially in that the Poisoned Pawn Najdorf was a precursor of many similar endeavours by both Black and White, and symbolic of a new attitude towards chess. Master players (most prominently Fischer, but also a number of innovative Soviet players before him) gradually adopted the attitude that these positions have nothing to do with rules or general principles, and everything to do with concrete analysis. If Black can take the pawn and win points, they concluded, anything goes. In the case before us, much of what matters can be worked out at home, and I recall that Fischer, for example, was said to have taken only a few minutes to play this game as Black against Tringov in Havana 1965 (from the diagram): 12...Qb4 13 Qb3 Wb5 14 0-0 0-0 15 Qxe6 fxe6 16 Qxe6+ Qh8 17 Qxf8+ Qxf8 18 Wf4 (D).

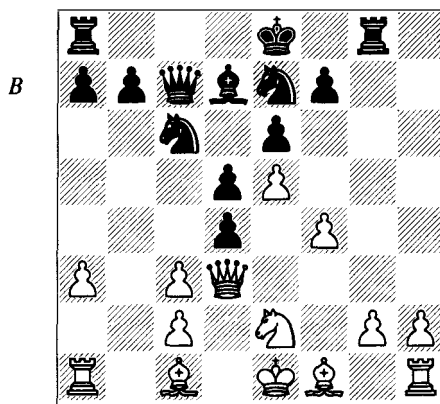
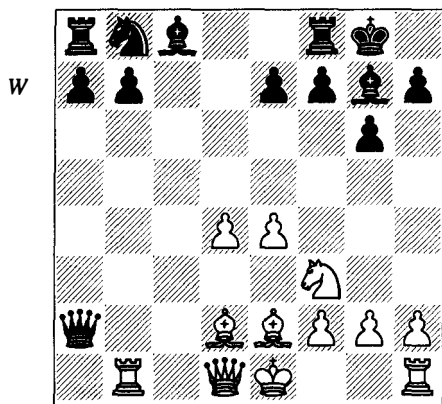
Doesn't this game look like Alekhine versus Amateur, random simultaneous? And would any of the Old Masters after 1900 allow such things as Black? And yet: 18...Qc6! 19 Wf7 Wc5+ 20 Qh1 Qf6! (and Black wins!) 21 Qxc8 Qxe5 22 We6 Qeg4 0-1.

To this day, the Poisoned Pawn Variation is the main deterrent to White's 6 Qg5 and 7 f4. When White does allow 7...Wb6, he tends to adopt more positional means (8 Qb3, avoiding the gambit, is often played, and if the gambit is offered by 8 Wd2, the move 10 f5 is usually chosen, with strategic aims taking precedence over immediate checkmating attempts). Kasparov, among others, continues to champion Black's position, and 6 Qg5 has seriously declined in popularity.

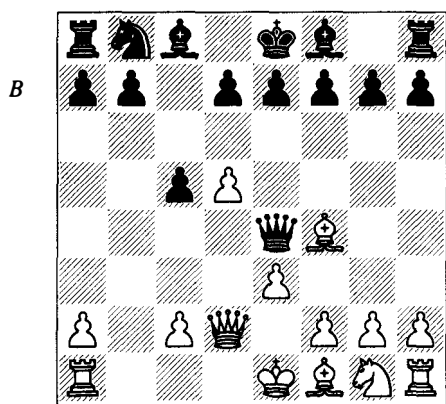
Let's say that you wanted to justify this excursion (7...Wb6 and 8...Wxb2) theoretically. One might point to the first part of the explanation I gave above, i.e., that White's interior defence is compromised by the capture on b2, so he is obliged to defend c3, and loose pieces such as the bishop on c4 and knight on d4 are subject to pressure from key central dark squares such as c5 and e5. I should add that such pawn-grabs are not always a matter of homework; intuition and detailed over-the-board analysis often suffice to convince the pawn-hunter to take a chance. But in general, the attempt to codify in words how and when one may go about such raids is doomed to failure. Analysis and practice decide.

Let's look at some other examples of flank-pawn raids:

The following position arises from a Grünfeld Defence following the moves 1 d4 Qf6 2 c4 g6 3 Qc3 d5 4 cxd5 Qxd5 5 e4 Qxc3 6 bxc3 Qg7 7 Qf3 c5 8 Qb1 0-0 9 Qe2 cxd4 10 cxd4 Wa5+ 11 Qd2 Wxa2 (D). It is another example of an early queen excursion (with only one other piece developed) to grab a flank pawn. After about a dozen years of intense



practice and theoretical work, it is still one of the main lines of the entire Grünfeld Defence. Black seems to be holding his own theoretically, but White is by no means backing down from the challenge (or fun?) of trying to punish his opponent's impudence.



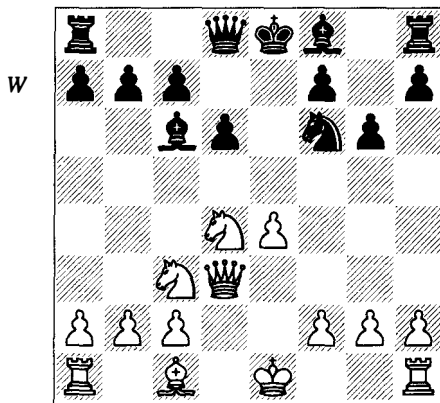
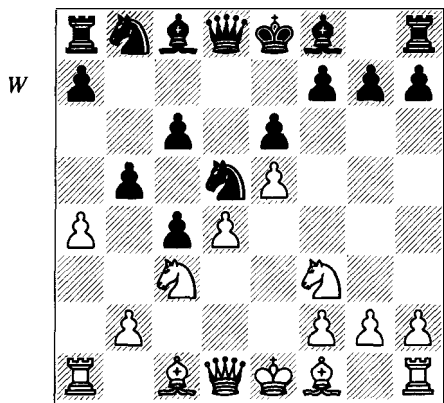
Here, again, Black has gone after the b2-pawn. This is from a Trompowsky Attack line which in itself contains some modern ideas of note: 1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♙g5 (bishops before knights!) 2...♘e4 3 ♙f4 c5 4 d5 ♗b6 5 ♗d2!? ♗xb2 6 ♘xe4 ♗b4+ 7 ♗d2 ♗xe4 (again, Black has no pieces out and hasn't even moved a centre pawn...) 8 e3. How to assess this position? White has space, superior development, and the prospect of kicking the queen around a bit more. Nevertheless, Black's weakness-free position is considered at least playable by theory.

The next position is from the main-line 7 ♗g4 Winawer French with 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♙xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♘e7 7 ♗g4 ♗c7 8 ♗xg7 ♗g8 9 ♗xh7 cxd4 10 ♘e2

♘bc6 11 f4 ♙d7 12 ♗d3. Like the Poisoned Pawn Najdorf, it is an old and thoroughly-analysed position. White decides that turnabout is fair play in the flank-pawn-grabbing business. By consuming the g- and h-pawns at considerable cost of time (no pieces out, as usual), he will not only gain material (assuming, for example, that Black at some point captures on c3 and White recaptures), but he also destroys Black's interior defence on the kingside (f6 is a glaring hole, and White's h-pawn is passed). Black, on the other hand, has superior development, with open files on that same kingside. He also has an extra centre pawn and play down the c-file, once White captures on c3. Years of experience and thousands of games have taught that White must suffer for his excursion, but that if Black's attack fails, the second player will sometimes succumb to the two bishops in an ending. This line is still evolving, and its theoretical verdict is still 'unclear', suggesting at the very least that White has not violated any valid general principles with his pawn-hunting.

Moving away from queen pirating raids for a moment, there are any number of openings in which one side grabs a pawn on the flank and then defends it. The diagram on the following page comes from the Slav Defence: 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 dxc4 5 e4!? b5 6 e5 ♘d5 7 a4 e6 (D).

But in fact, there are a slew of such lines in the Réti, other Slavs, and the Queen's Gambit Accepted (e.g., 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘c3 dxc4 4 ♘f3 b5 5 g3 e6, 1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 a6 5 e4 b5 6 e5 ♘d5, and 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 e6 5 ♙g5 dxc4 6 e4 b5). We won't dwell on the details here, but it's worth



pointing out that Black isn't giving up the centre and his development (see that c8-bishop?) for a pawn alone. He also hopes that his pawn-mass on the queenside will exert a cramping influence on White's development, and will eventually be turned into a decisive passed pawn or two. The price he pays is to be subjected to an attack, which accounts for White's willingness to enter such lines. Both sides' assessments are pragmatic ones, based as always upon concrete analysis. Very few masters will play such lines unprepared! But unlike the queen raids described above, this type of pawn-grab does have an honourable predecessor from the nineteenth century, namely the King's Gambit (1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 d3 d6 4 d4 g5, for example).

To conclude this section, let's take a look at a long-standing debate about the following flank-pawn grab:

Nimzowitsch – Capablanca

St Petersburg 1914

1 e4 e5 2 d3 d6 3 d4 c6 4 d5 d6 5 d4 d7 6 dxc6 dxc6 7 d3 exd4 8 dxd4 g6 (D)

This is a fun example for more than one reason. Capablanca was certainly no great fan of the fianchetto (only marginally more so than the other great players of his day), but he does indicate in his writings that he favoured the fianchetto in Ruy Lopez-like positions where ...exd4 had been played. That he was willing to expend time in this fashion is a bit surprising, since Steinitz and even Nimzowitsch, in similar positions, tended to urge restraint of the e4-pawn by ...d7, ...0-0, ...e8 and ...f8. And

in this particular case, the move practically loses a pawn by force.

9 dxc6

Coincidentally, an article by Kasparov in *ChessBase Magazine* about precisely this contest just fell into my hands (as we will see, this game has attracted attention for many years). He claims that 8...g6 is dubious because White can continue with 9 d5 d6 10 0-0-0, e.g., 10...h6 (10...0-0? 11 dxc6 bxc6 12 e5! dxe5 13 f3 wins) 11 h4 0-0 12 f4, when 12...e8 loses to 13 dxc6 bxc6 14 e5, etc. Nimzowitsch goes after a pawn instead.

9...bxc6 10 a6 d7

What else? 10...c5? 11 c6+ d7 12 d5! is just awful.

11 b7 c8 12 xa7

So White is a pawn up. Was this an intentional sacrifice? McDonald, in his book *Positional Sacrifices*, frames the issue nicely by reviewing historical opinion and adding his own:

"... Euwe remarks at move 8 that 'it was not so difficult to see the loss of a pawn by force in two or three moves, but Capablanca apparently did not imagine that such a thing could happen in the solid Steinitz Defence of the Ruy Lopez. Capablanca's mistakes are just as clear as his good moves.'

"Neither Nimzowitsch nor Euwe could comprehend that Capablanca had *deliberately* sacrificed the pawn. Euwe calls it an 'accident with a happy ending'. Capablanca himself saw things differently: 'I believe [Nimzowitsch] has been unjustly criticized for losing the game ... [the critics] have all suggested moves here and there; but the games of the great masters are not

played by single moves, but must be played by connected plans of attack and defence, and these they have not given.” [remarks and italics are McDonald’s; the Capablanca quote is from *My Chess Career*].

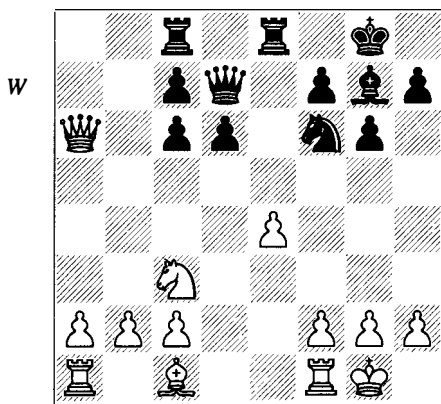
McDonald goes on to explain that, as opposed to Nimzowitsch and Euwe, “any modern player would appreciate the value of Capablanca’s concept”, an interesting claim. I might rephrase this to assert that, in addition, any modern player would recognize Black’s main threats in the position, and probably defend a great deal better than Nimzowitsch subsequently does!

12...♙g7 13 0-0 0-0

McDonald maps out a further course for Black (put the rooks on the open queenside files and manoeuvre a knight to c4), and he believes that White lacks a good plan, which he (correctly) calls one of the ‘key features of a positional sacrifice’, i.e., that while the sacrificer can improve his position, his opponent has difficulty doing the same.

But is it true in this case? I marked this position for further study while reading his book, because it didn’t seem plausible that Black had enough for a pawn. Remarkably, I was later browsing through Dvoretzky and Yusupov’s *Training For the Tournament Player*, and found a short but excellent commentary by Shereshevsky on this very topic.

14 ♖a6 ♜fe8 (D)



Here Nimzowitsch played 15 ♗d3 ♗e6 16 f3, and after 16...♘d7 17 ♙d2 (‘?’ Kasparov, who gives 17 ♙f4 ♘e5 18 ♙xe5 ♙xe5 19 ♜ab1) 17...♘e5 18 ♗e2 ♗c4, Black had a great

deal of pressure (...♜a8 and ...♜eb8 will follow), and went on to win. A Benko Gambiteer would be particularly happy here as Black.

But Shereshevsky writes: “I found the right explanation for what happened in Znosko-Borovsky’s book [*The Middlegame in Chess*]. He writes that if your opponent has a lead in time (in development) but you have extra material, in no circumstances should you divert to defensive duties any pieces which are exerting pressure on the enemy position. Such pieces may be placed perilously, involving some risk, but they prevent the opponent from manoeuvring freely. From the a6-square the queen attacks the pawn on c6 and prevents Black from regrouping with ...♗e6, ...♘d7, ...♘b6(e5), and ...♘c4. The correct move was 15 f3!. It is necessary to reckon with the reply ...♜a8, but then White may play ♗c4. The essence of the matter consists in not removing the queen from a position where it is attacking the c6-square.”

He then compares this position to a Poisoned Pawn Najdorf, in which the black queen on b2 or a3 is subject to attack, but also ‘prevents White from manoeuvring freely’.

What to make of all this? In the first place, I don’t believe that Capablanca intentionally sacrificed the pawn. It is hardly in his style, and I personally don’t believe that the sacrifice is quite sound. Capablanca himself, a very proud man when it came to admitting mistakes, did not even claim to have sacrificed the pawn, and in fact, in his notes in *My Chess Career*, strongly implies that he just moved quickly and lost a pawn. He calls 8...g6 “a novel idea, brought out at the spur of the moment”. It is interesting that Kasparov, perhaps following the lead of other annotators, simply assumes that Capablanca sacrificed the pawn intentionally, calling it ‘a profound concept’. This is a little strange, since he also thinks that 8...g6 should have led to a large disadvantage against White’s most natural moves (see his note to White’s 9th move).

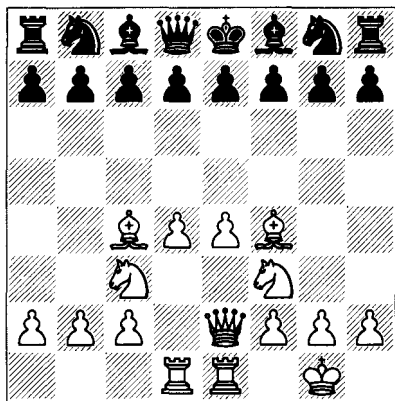
In any case, this rift of opinion is fascinating, but not very important. As for the position itself, I have looked at Shereshevsky’s 15 f3! at some length, and personally believe that, although Black has some compensation for the pawn, it is not sufficient. At some point, unable to achieve the ...♘d7-e5-c4 idea efficiently, he probably has to play ...d5, and there can easily

result an ending which only White can hope to win.

More interesting still is Znosko-Borovsky's defensive 'principle'. This rather subtle notion is an example of the sort of context-sensitive rule which could still be relevant in modern chess, as opposed to the sweeping generalities of old. Sometimes, of course, hightailing it back home with that exposed queen is in fact the right thing to do, and the first step in a successful consolidation. In the Trompowsky variation cited above, for example, the idea ...♖b4, and after c3, ...♗a5, often followed by ...♗c7 or ...♗d8, is a good defensive strategy. Nevertheless, the prophylaxis exerted by the queens in Shereshevsky's two examples strikes me as both effective and typical of such positions.

The Really Big Centre

One of the most confusing aspects of positional chess involves the value and drawbacks of a large, mobile pawn-centre. Classical texts tend to emphasize that, if Black doesn't challenge the centre, White should at any rate play e4 and d4 and advance those pawns judiciously to cramp the opponent. For the record, by the way, classical theory seems to imply that if God were playing White, his goal would be to reach this position:



But not often addressed is the question of whether, given a free hand to play e4 and d4, White should also throw in f4 and/or c4. Interestingly, the first reaction to most modern black defences which don't commit a pawn to the fourth rank has historically been some attempt

to throw three or more pawns forward to overrun the opponent's position. In the early days of the King's Indian Defence (in the 1920s), for example, the Four Pawns Attack was very popular: 1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 f4. It never has been since. And when the Pirc Defence first gained acceptance (say, in the 1960s), White played the Austrian Attack (1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♖f6 3 ♘c3 g6 4 f4) often and with gusto; in those days, e5 tended to follow quickly, whereas today, White is more circumspect. Similarly, when the Modern Defence came upon the scene (late 1960s and early 1970s), the line 1 e4 g6 2 d4 ♗g7 3 ♘c3 d6 4 f4 was exhaustively analysed, whereas now White tends to play more modestly. Moving away from examples involving ...g6, the Four Pawns Attack against Alekhine's Defence (1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♖b6 5 f4) used to be far more popular than it is now. And in the Grünfeld Defence, the romantic age of f4s with g4s and/or f5s (as in Spassky-Fischer, Siegen Olympiad 1970: 1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 cxd5 ♗xd5 5 e4 ♖xc3 6 bxc3 ♗g7 7 ♗c4 c5 8 ♗e2 ♖c6 9 ♗e3 0-0 10 0-0 ♗c7 11 ♗cl ♗d8 12 h3 b6 13 f4 e6 14 ♗el ♗a5 15 ♗d3 f5 16 g4, etc.) has given way to more manageable central formations for White, such as c3/d4/e4/f2.

But there are exceptions. In confronting today's irregular openings, it may sometimes be best simply to abandon restraint and charge with the troops, as in this Karpov effort against the vaunted 'Kangaroo' opening:

Karpov – Miles

Biel 1992

1 d4 e6 2 c4 ♗b4+ 3 ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 4 ♗xd2 b6 5 ♘c3 ♗b7 6 e4 ♘h6 7 f4!

Going all-out; previous games had featured simple developing moves.

7...f5 8 e5 ♖f7 9 0-0-0 g5 10 ♖f3! ♗g8 11 ♗e2 ♗a6 12 h3 gxf4 13 ♗xf4 ♗e7 14 g4 fxe4 15 hxe4 ♘g5 16 d5

The pawns are paralysing Black, who lost rather quickly.

The Mobile Central Pawn-Mass

Overall, then, chess-players have drifted away from these mega-centres. This leaves open the

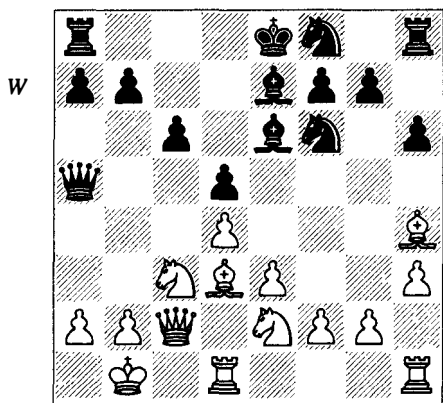
issue of how the treatment of a normal central pawn-mass (with, say, two leading pawns) has evolved. Let's start with what Nimzowitsch said. Speaking of the advance of centre pawns in one game, he says: "the pawn advance was no isolated, self-contained process. On the contrary, it derived its strength from the readiness of the pieces behind them to occupy central squares." This rings as true today as it did then. If one's pieces can't follow and support the attack, central pawn advances tend (with exceptions, of course) to be premature.

The Queen's Gambit Declined, Exchange Variation has long been an opening in which central pawn advances are common. Nimzowitsch himself, in his game as White against Romih, London 1927, played this line with a rather modern flair:

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♟f6 4 ♙g5

The modern order is 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♙g5.

4...♟bd7 5 e3 c6 6 cxd5 exd5 7 ♙d3 ♙d6 8 ♛c2 h6 9 ♙h4 ♛a5 10 0-0-0 ♙b4 11 ♟ge2 ♙e7 12 ♟b1 ♟f8 13 h3 ♙e6 (D)



14 f3!

The first step towards establishing a central pawn-roller.

14...a6 15 a3 ♙d7 16 ♙xf6! ♙xf6 17 e4 ♟e6 18 e5 ♙e7 19 f4

The pawns threaten to overrun Black's position.

19...♟c7 20 f5 ♟b5 21 ♛hf1 ♛b6 22 ♙xb5 axb5 23 ♟f4 b4 24 ♟cxd5!

Planned well in advance; this secures an even more mobile pawn-mass.

24...cxd5 25 ♟xd5 ♛a5 26 ♟c7+ ♟d8 27 ♟xa8 ♛xa8 28 d5

What pawns! The game ended nicely following 28...♛c8 29 ♛e4 ♛e8 30 ♛c1 ♛b8 31 e6 ♙b5 32 ♛d4 b6 33 d6! ♙f6 34 e7+ ♟d7 35 ♛d5 ♙xf1 36 ♛c6#. This would have been a good example for Nimzowitsch's pawn-centre chapter.

In Zurich 1934 (one year before our arbitrary 'modern' breakpoint), Euwe played the white side of a Nimzo-Indian against Bogoljubow in a similar fashion: 1 d4 ♟f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♟c3 ♙b4 4 a3 ♙xc3+ 5 bxc3 c5 6 f3 d5 7 e3 ♟c6 8 cxd5 exd5 9 ♙d3 ♟e7 10 ♟e2 ♙f5 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♙xf5 ♟xf5 13 e4 dxe4 14 fxe4 ♟e7 15 ♛d3 ♟d7 16 ♙f4 and White had a clear advantage based on his mobile central pawns.

The basic pawn-roller concept expressed in these games appears frequently throughout modern chess. Although the treatment of such central pawns has become more sophisticated, it has not fundamentally changed since Nimzowitsch's time. Here's a more recent example, again from the Queen's Gambit:

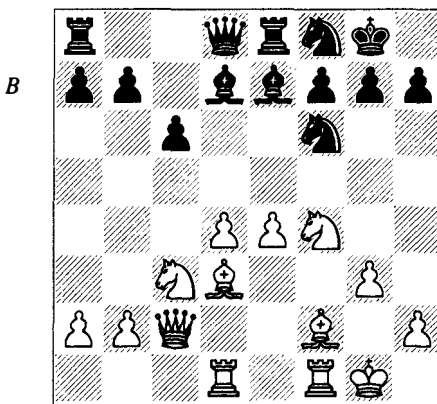
Sadler – Murugan

London 1993

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♟c3 ♟f6 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♙g5 c6 6 e3 ♙e7 7 ♙d3 0-0 8 ♛c2 ♟bd7 9 ♟ge2 ♛e8 10 0-0 ♟f8 11 f3 ♙e6 12 ♙h4 ♟d6 13 ♙f2 ♙h4 14 g3 ♙e7 15 ♟f4

Not in any hurry to play for e4.

15...♟f6 16 ♛ad1 ♙d7 17 e4 dxe4 18 fxe4 (D)



The mobile pawn-centre.

18...♟g4 19 ♙c4 ♟e6 20 ♟xe6 ♙xe6 21 d5 cxd5 22 exd5 ♙d7 23 d6 ♙f6 24 ♟d5

White's passed pawn and space give him a large edge, although the play which follows is not perfect for either side.

24...♖c8 25 ♘c7!? ♘xf2 ♙xf2 ♙f8 27 ♚d3?! ♙g4 28 ♙e1 ♙xc7! 29 dxc7 ♚xc7

Worse is 29...♚xd3 30 ♙xd3 ♙d4 31 ♙e4 ♙xf2+ 32 ♚xf2 ♙e6 33 ♙d4.

30 ♚e4 ♙h5 31 ♙d3 ♙g6 32 ♚e3 ♚d6? 33 ♙xg6 ♙d4 34 ♙xf7+ 1-0

34...♙xf7 35 ♚xd4!.

Euwe and Kramer do an excellent job of classifying pawn centres according to type, and it might be interesting to compare older and modern treatments of a few of their classifications. In a chapter called 'Pawn Preponderance in the Centre', they discuss two formations of interest. The first is the 'Classic Centre' (e4/d4 versus a d6-pawn and no black e-pawn). Their example is an old Giuoco Piano game Leonhardt-Burn, Karlsbad 1911: 1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙c4 ♙c5 4 c3 d6 5 d4 exd4 6 cxd4 ♙b6 7 ♘c3 ♘f6 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♙b3 (else ...♘xe4!) 9...♙g4 (the only critical move; otherwise h3 and where does this bishop go?) 10 ♙e3 h6 (10...♙xf3 11 gxf3 opens the g-file and permits a later f4; best was 10...♙e8! 11 ♚d3 ♙h5!, according to Euwe, who nevertheless gives 12 ♘d2 ♙g6 13 d5! ♘e5 14 ♚e2 with advantage; see a comparable idea in the next example) 11 ♚d3 ♙e8 12 ♘d2 ♚e7 13 ♙a1 ♙ad8 14 a3 ♚f8 15 f4! (threatening f5 and h3) 15...♙c8 16 h3 ♚h8 17 g4! (using his central and spatial advantage to launch an attack) 17...♘e7 18 ♚h1 d5 19 e5 ♘h7 20 f5 f6 21 e6, and the pawn on e6 "cripples Black's whole army", in Euwe's words. White went on to win fairly easily.

Are we really any more 'advanced' in such positions today? Perhaps we have no greater understanding, but it must be said that modern players simply don't allow many such positions, and when they do, they tend to lash out for counterplay instead of being squeezed to death. Here's an analogous example from modern times:

Babula – Miladinović

Calicut 1993

1 d4 d5 2 c4 ♘c6 3 ♘f3 ♙g4 4 cxd5 ♙xf3 5 dxc6 ♙xc6 6 ♘c3 e6 7 e4

We have the same central situation as in Leonhardt-Burn above, but with a black e-pawn instead of a d-pawn. Note how from now on, Black ceaselessly tries to weaken and disturb White's structure, so as not to fall subject to that which befell Burn.

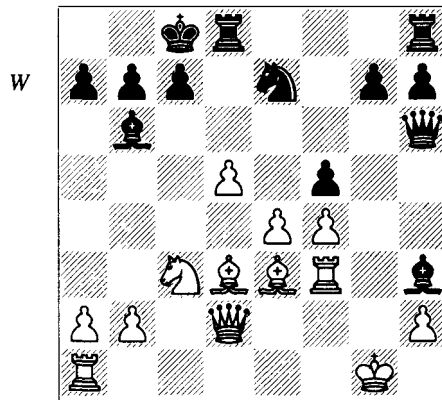
7...♙b4 8 f3 ♚h4+ 9 g3 ♚f6 10 ♙e3 0-0-0 11 ♙d3 ♙a5!

A move originally suggested by this author; compare Euwe's note about ...♙h5! in the game above.

12 0-0 ♙b6 13 ♘e2 e5 14 ♚d2 ♘e7 15 d5

So the centre is still intact and dangerous, but Black has anticipated this:

15...♚h6! 16 f4 ♙d7 17 ♘c3 exf4 18 gxf4 ♙h3 19 ♙f3 f5 (D)



Finally, the end of White's proud centre!

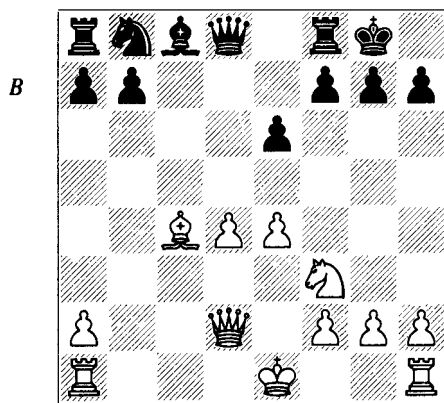
20 ♙xb6 ♚xb6+ 21 ♚f2 ♚xf2+ 22 ♚xf2 fxe4 23 ♙xh3 exd3 24 ♙xd3 ♙hf8

White's three isolated pawns doom him. The game continued 25 ♚g3 ♙d6 26 ♙e1 ♙g6+ 27 ♚f3 ♘f5 28 ♙e6 ♘h4+ 29 ♚e4 ♙g4 30 ♘e2 ♙g2 31 ♘d4 ♙f2 32 f5 ♘xf5 33 ♘xf5 ♙8xf5 34 ♙h3 ♙f7 35 ♙xh7 ♙xb2 36 h4 ♙xa2, and Black went on to win easily.

With respect to Nimzowitsch's idea of the strength of the pawn-mass residing in the "readiness of the pieces behind them to occupy central squares", the basic ideas have not changed, but the modern player is probably more willing to make concessions in order to achieve this sort of advantage, as we will examine next.

Euwe and Kramer call d4/e4 vs e6 or e7 a 'Neo-Classic Centre', which is far more frequent in modern chess than the 'Classic'. In the

Semi-Tarrasch Defence, a speciality of the old masters, this formation can arise after, e.g., 1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 d4 c5 5 cxd5 ♘xd5 6 e4 ♘xc3 7 bxc3 cxd4 8 cxd4 ♘b4+ 9 ♘d2 ♘xd2+ 10 ♚xd2 0-0 11 ♘c4 (D).



The first point to make that is relevant to the evolution of modern chess is that such open, more double-edged systems did not come naturally to the classical player. I can find only 24 examples of the 6 e4 ♘xc3 idea in a large database for the years 1900-1935. Of those games, only 4 were played prior to 1930 (one with Alekhine as White, as might be expected)! The point is that White almost always preferred a line with e3, the more passive position after 5 e3 ♘c6 arising, for example, 264 times in the same time-period. In modern times, of course, the idea of cxd5 followed by e4 became a main line. I think we must credit this change to both the more dynamic spirit of post-Nimzowitschian play and the rise of home analysis, which allowed White to make a better assessment of the risks involved in exposing his queenside in this fashion (the a-pawn and light squares such as c4 can be quite vulnerable, especially given the open c-file and ideas such as ...♚d6-a3).

At any rate, here is an older example of this position, in which White's treatment is not perfect, but nevertheless very admirable:

Keres – Fine
Ostend 1937

11...♘d7 12 0-0 b6 13 ♖ad1 ♘b7 14 ♖fe1 ♗c8 15 ♘b3 ♘f6 16 ♚f4 ♗c7 17 ♚h4 ♖fd8 18 ♖e3

Keres later preferred 18 e5, but keeping the tension is more subtle.

18...b5 19 ♖de1 a5 20 a4 b4!?

Euwe gives 20...bxa4 21 ♘xa4 h6.

21 d5! exd5 22 e5!

A fine conception! For a pawn, White renders Black's b7-bishop 'bad' and activates his rooks.

22...♘d7?

Black still had 22...♘e4, in view of 23 e6 fxe6 24 ♖xe4 dxe4 25 ♘g5 ♗c3, according to Keres. This casts the pawn sacrifice into some doubt; compare the next example.

23 ♘g5 ♘f8 24 ♘xh7! ♘xh7 25 ♖h3 ♗c1 26 ♚xh7+ ♗f8 27 ♖he3 d4 28 ♚h8+ ♗e7 29 ♚xg7 ♖f8 30 ♚f6+ ♗e8 31 e6 1-0

The following very famous example has both similarities and differences. On the one hand, White plays the same kind of pawn sacrifice (d5/e5), and targets the black king. On the other hand, his compensation is much more positional, and more in line with Nimzowitsch's remark about the pieces occupying central squares. It is also a more correct sacrifice. In fact, the whole idea was conceived by Polugaevsky and Spassky in home analysis, which reduces its creative status by comparison with a daring over-the-board stroke. However, this in a sense allowed Polugaevsky to be *more* creative, in that such an abstract form of compensation and the rather anti-intuitive attack which follows could probably not be risked by a successful practical player without preparation.

Polugaevsky – Tal

USSR Ch, Moscow 1969
(from the diagram)

11...♘c6 12 0-0 b6 13 ♖ad1 ♘b7 14 ♖fe1 ♘a5 15 ♘d3 ♖c8 16 d5! exd5 17 e5!

Activating the d3-bishop, f3-knight, and rooks all in one stroke!

17...♘c4

17...♗e7 18 ♚f4! led to a substantial advantage for White in Bagirov-Zhuravliov, USSR 1974, while a later game N.Popov-Rumiantsev, USSR 1978 went 17...h6 18 ♚f4 ♘c6 19 ♚f5 g6 20 ♚g4 with a winning advantage.

18 ♚f4 ♘b2 19 ♘xh7+! ♗xh7 20 ♘g5+ ♗g6 21 h4!!

This is the point. White threatens a ring-around-the-rosy mate by 22 h5+ ♖xh5 23 g4+ ♖g6 24 ♗f5+ ♖h6 25 ♗h7+ ♖xg5 26 ♗h5+ ♖f4 27 ♗f5#!

21...♞c4

The only try.

22 h5+ ♖h6 23 ♖xf7++ ♖h7 24 ♗f5+ ♖g8 25 e6!

And Black is helpless against White's threats such as h6.

The game concluded nicely:

25...♗f6

25...♗e7 26 h6!.

26 ♗xf6 gxf6 27 ♠d2 ♞c6! 28 ♠xb2 ♞e8 29 ♖h6+ ♖h7 30 ♖f5 ♞xe6 31 ♠xe6 ♞xe6 32 ♠c2 ♠c6 33 ♠e2 ♠c8 34 ♠e7+ ♖h8 35 ♖h4 f5 36 ♖g6+ ♖g8 37 ♠xa7 1-0

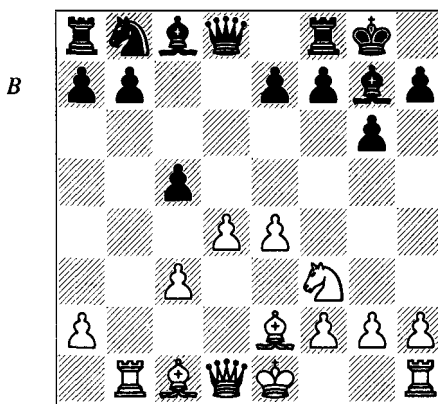
Quite beautiful. Of course, there's nothing revolutionary in all that, but the pawn sacrifice to shut out the bishop and get a knight to d4 has a modern flavour to it (see the section in Part 2, Chapter 3 on positional pawn sacrifices). The powerful influence of concrete home analysis is another (perhaps less fortunate) sign of the times.

A similar situation to that described in the Semi-Tarrasch has arisen in the Grünfeld Defence. If you look at old databases (1900-1935), White tended to choose one passive line or another against this defence. For example, 1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 d5 4 ♖f3 ♠g7 5 e3 was extremely popular, intending the mighty 6 ♠d2. No wonder people were giving 3...d5 an '!'. In the modern era, the main approaches became 5 ♗b3 dxc4 6 ♗xc4 0-0 7 e4 and 4 cxd5 ♖xd5 5 e4 ♖xc3 6 bxc3, accepting the challenge of defending a large centre in return for the its dynamic potential. In fact, the dynamism exhibited in one of the current main lines is typical of the modern approach to many positions:

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 d5 4 cxd5 ♖xd5 5 e4 ♖xc3 6 bxc3 ♠g7 7 ♖f3 c5 8 ♠b1 0-0 9 ♠e2 (D)

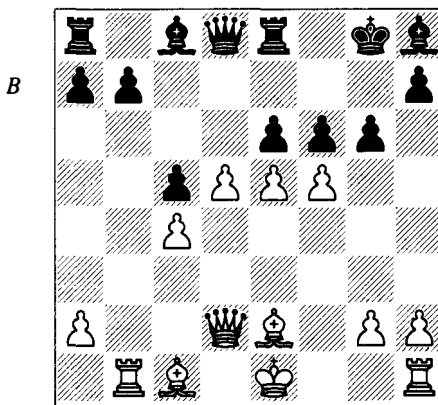
Now 9...♗a5 10 0-0! is one of those times when grabbing pawns, either by 10...♗xa2 or 10...♗xc3, simply doesn't pay, as theory demonstrates.

Continuing from the diagram position, we present our two last examples of mobile central pawns:



McCambridge – Hjartarson
Grindavik 1984

9...♖c6 10 d5 ♖e5 11 ♖xe5 ♠xe5 12 ♗d2 e6 13 f4 ♠h8 14 c4 ♠e8 15 e5 f6 16 f5!! (D)



Sometimes the pawns are just too strong! Now 16...exf5 17 e6 will cramp Black permanently, so the game proceeded:

16...gxf5 17 ♠b3 ♠e7 18 d6

Both 18 ♠b2 and 18 ♗h6 won later games more convincingly, but the details aren't really important here.

18...♠g7 19 exf6 ♗xf6 20 ♠b2 e5? 21 ♠xe5! ♗xe5 22 ♠e3 ♗e6 23 ♠xe6 ♠xe6 24 ♗e3 ♠e8 25 ♗xc5

and White went on to win.

A bit barbaric, that one. From the diagram at the top of the column, 9...cxd4 10 cxd4 ♗a5+ 11 ♠d2 ♗xa2, illustrates that the centre pawns

can sometimes be worth a material investment, even if there are no immediate threats, for example, 12 0-0 ♖e6 13 ♜c2 ♜c6 14 ♜d3 and now:

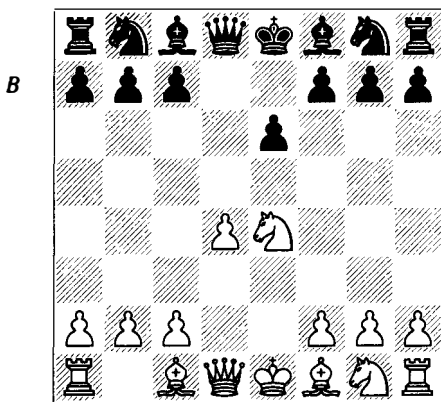
a) 14...♗g4!? 15 d5 ♜d7 16 ♜b3 ♗xf3 17 ♗xf3 is an example from one of my own games. White's bishops are the 'pieces behind the centre', exerting terrific pressure: 17...b6 18 ♜a3 ♜d8 19 ♗b4 ♜e8 20 e5 ♜d7 21 d6, and Black had to give up material by 21...exd6 22 ♗xa8 ♜xa8 23 exd6 in J.Watson-Ramirez, Los Angeles 1997.

b) 14...♜d6 15 ♗b4 ♜d8 16 d5 and Black has serious difficulties coping with White's advancing pawns, e.g., 16...♜a6 17 ♗a3 b6 18 ♜e3! ♜c5 19 ♜fd1 ♗g4 20 e5 ♜c8 21 h3 ♗xf3 22 ♗xf3 with advantage, Gelfand-Kamsky, Belgrade 1991.

Nothing in this section is utterly offensive to the tenets of classical theory. Nevertheless, modern practice is clearly more confrontational and also takes some of these hyper-critical positions to the extreme, in contrast to the careful and sedate 'one or two pawns only' practice of pre-modern chess. We will explore truly revolutionary conceptions of the centre and pawn play in Part 2.

Surrender of the Centre

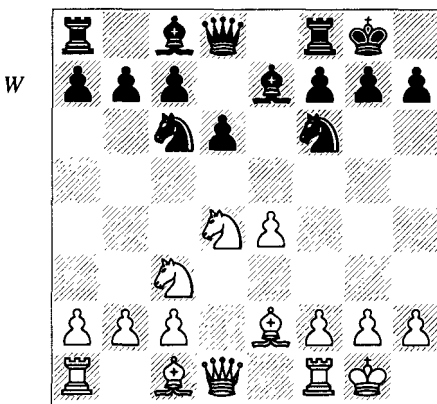
For our last introductory mini-topic, we examine a subject close to Nimzowitsch's heart: the 'surrender of the centre'. Nimzowitsch gives us one of his homespun metaphors about the position after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜c3 dxe4 4 ♜xe4 (D):



"If, in a battle, I seize a bit of debatable land with a handful of soldiers, without having done anything to prevent an enemy bombardment of the position, would it ever occur to me to speak of a conquest of the terrain in question? Obviously not. Then why should I do so in chess? ... pressure exerted on the enemy centre by the long-range action of rooks or bishops directed on it can well be of corresponding importance.

"We meet this last case in the variation 3...dxe4. This move, so wrongly described as a surrender of the centre, as a matter of fact increases Black's effective influence in the centre very considerably; for with the removal by ...dxe4 of the pawn at d5, which is an obstruction, Black gets a free hand on the d-file, and the long diagonal b7 to h1, which he will open for himself by ...b6. Obstruction! That is the dark side of the occupation of the centre by pawns."

Well, one might imagine that 3 exd5 or 3 e5 was White's only chance for equality! Of course, this was part of a greater polemic against Tarrasch, who considered 3...dxe4 inferior. Nimzowitsch's other favourite opening in this regard was Philidor's Defence, e.g., Leonhardt-Nimzowitsch, San Sebastian 1912: 1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 d6 3 d4 ♜f6 4 ♜c3 exd4 (sometimes Nimzowitsch delayed this capture, and the year before against Teichmann, had also tried the strategy of strong-pointing e5) 5 ♜xd4 ♗e7 6 ♗e2 0-0 7 0-0 ♜c6 (D) followed by ...♜e8 and ...♗f8.



His idea was first to stop White's e5 (restraint), and then train his forces against the target on e4, finally either forcing a concession or liquidating it via ...d5. Alas, Nimzowitsch's

argument ignores White's greater space and manoeuvrability, and in fact, both of these openings disappeared into obscurity as the years went on (recently, the 3...dxe4 French has undergone a slight revival; but it is being used as a drawing weapon for Black with a quick ...c5, hardly what Nimzowitsch had envisaged). What's more, the similar lines of the Ruy Lopez with ...exd4 have always been considered better for White.

Today, players are not inclined to cramp themselves so without reward. However, there are a number of openings in which a similar surrender of the centre is justified. In most cases, this is because the dark-squared bishop, instead of sitting dully at e7 or f8, takes up a dynamic post on g7. For example, in the King's Indian Defence there are a number of lines with ...exd4/♟xd4 and consequent pressure down the e-file and along the h8-a1 diagonal. One recent example is the rather Nimzowitschian 1 d4 ♟f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♟c3 ♟g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♟f3 0-0 6 ♟e2 e5 7 0-0 exd4 8 ♟xd4 ♟e8 9 f3 ♟c6!?, in which one of Black's primary ideas is to play ...♟h5 and ...f5, to break down White's grip on the centre. A radical example is Adorjan's line 1 c4 g6 2 e4 e5 3 ♟f3 ♟g7 4 d4 exd4 5 ♟xd4 ♟f6 6 ♟c3 0-0 7 ♟e2 ♟e8 8 f3, but now we see that Adorjan will have nothing to do with mere 'restraint' of White's centre. Rather, his idea is active and tactical: 8...c6! 9 ♟g5 h6 10 ♟h4 d5! 11 exd5 cxd5 12 0-0 ♟c6 13 ♟xc6 bxc6 14 ♟f2 ♟e6 15 ♟a4 ♟h5! 16 cxd5 ♟xd5 17 ♟e1 ♟g5 18 ♟h1 ♟f4 19 ♟f1 ♟c4 with excellent activity, Bobotsov-Adorjan, Vrnjačka Banja 1972. This surrender of the centre for the sake of dynamic activity, as opposed to mere restraint, is more typical of modern theory.

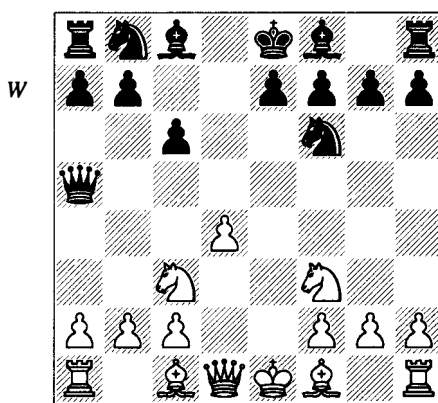
And how about the Caro Kann after 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♟c3 dxe4 4 ♟xe4? Well, to some extent, Nimzowitsch would be right to say that play down the d-file is what offers Black chances, but the rest of his formula is a bit lacking (it is not usually effective to play ...b6 or ...g6, for example). As with other modern examples of the 'surrender of the centre', Black's most realistic plan is not restraint and attack on the enemy pawn, but rather, early liquidation. In the case of the Caro-Kann (and the 3...dxe4 French, by the way), this usually involves the move ...c5.

The same pawn structure can arise via the newly-popular Scandinavian Defence, for instance:

Kasparov – Anand

PCA World Ch match (game 14),
New York 1995

1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♟xd5 3 ♟c3 ♟a5 4 d4 ♟f6 5 ♟f3 c6 (D)



Although Black hasn't played ...dxe4, he might as well have. One might think that Black should suffer from the loss of time with his queen (...♟xd5-a5), yet White would rather not have his knight on c3, blocking the c-pawn. This has interesting consequences: in what follows, Black neither puts serious pressure on d4, nor does he play the liquidating ...c5 or ...e5. Rather, his compensation for the surrendered centre consists of active piece play. This is an illustration that such positions must be assessed on a variation-by-variation basis, and not according to general principle.

6 ♟e5 ♟e6! 7 ♟d3 ♟bd7 8 f4 g6 9 0-0 ♟g7 10 ♟h1 ♟f5! 11 ♟c4?! e6 12 ♟e2

Kasparov mentions 12 ♟xd7 ♟xd7 13 ♟e3 ♟hd8 with a slight advantage for Black. Modern opening theory includes many variations in which the king is temporarily or even permanently left in the centre in order to achieve other positional goals.

12...h5 13 ♟e3 ♟d8 14 ♟g1 0-0 15 ♟f3 ♟d5! 16 ♟xd5 exd5

Kasparov gives 16...cxd5 here, with some advantage.

17 ♟f2 ♟c7 18 ♟c1 f6 19 ♟d3 ♟fe8

Black has a small advantage due to his somewhat better placed pieces. Thus (although this is an exceptional example), surrendering the centre sometimes incurs no penalty whatsoever. It really comes down to concrete analysis.

This could lead us into a general discussion of small centres and restraint. Hedgehog and Sicilian centres (...d6/...e6 versus pawns on e4

and c4, or just e4, with an open white d-file) have some similarities to Nimzowitsch's surrendered centre, despite the lack of an open black central file. Those structures have become increasingly popular and have the dynamic characteristics Nimzowitsch sought from his Frenches and Philidors. We will be looking at them in some detail in Part 2.

3 Minorities, Majorities, and Passed Pawns

The passed pawn, and the pawn majorities used to create passed pawns, have traditionally been accorded a lot of attention in instructional and theoretical books. Similarly, these works tend to devote at least a section to the minority attack, as exemplified by the Queen's Gambit Exchange Variation. In this chapter, we briefly review that older theory, and then take a look at modern conceptions of these subjects. Probably the most important changes here concern the relative value and importance we now attach to these elements of play.

Minority Attacks

The minority attack is a strange area of theory. As far as I know, Nimzowitsch, who was very concerned with the restraint of pawn majorities, never dealt with attacking them from a position of numerical inferiority. Pachman claims that this concept first entered the chess consciousness in the 1920s, and thus attributes great historical value to the following game:

Capablanca – Lasker

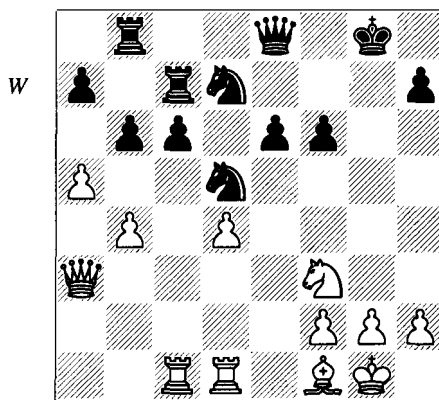
World Ch match (game 11), Havana 1921

1 d4 d5 2 ♘f3 e6 3 c4 ♘f6 4 ♙g5 ♘bd7 5 e3 ♙e7 6 ♘c3 0-0 7 ♙c1 ♙e8 8 ♙c2 c6 9 ♙d3 dxc4 10 ♙xc4 ♘d5 11 ♙xe7 ♙xe7 12 0-0 ♘f8 13 ♙fd1 ♙d7 14 e4 ♘b6 15 ♙f1 ♙c8 16 b4

The beginning of a type of 'minority' attack, with the a-pawn and b-pawn being used against the black a-, b-, and c-pawns. Strictly speaking, there should be a black pawn on d5 to make it what we classically refer to as a true minority attack.

16...♙e8 17 ♙b3 ♙ec7 18 a4 ♘g6 19 a5! ♘d7 20 e5! b6 21 ♘e4 ♙b8 22 ♙c3 ♘f4 23 ♘d6 ♘d5 24 ♙a3 f6 25 ♘xe8 ♙xe8 26 exf6 gxf6 (D)

This game has interesting features aside from its minority attack. For one thing, note how



Lasker accepts a very cramped position with moves like 12...♘f8 and 16...♙e8, and anticipates a Nimzowitsch or Petrosian with the prophylactic ...♙e7-c7. He even allows a white knight into d6. All of this is consistent with Lasker's tendency to play inferior positions with defensive potential, counting upon his brilliant resourcefulness to outplay his opponent later. From his standpoint, the concession ultimately forced upon him by the d6-knight – namely, giving White a bishop-versus-knight advantage – may have seemed rather small. But Capablanca proceeds to show that such advantages are generally decisive, as we know today. First, he continues his minority attack:

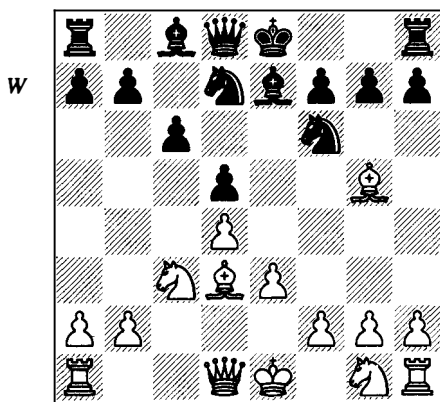
27 b5! ♙bc8 28 bxc6 ♙xc6 29 ♙xc6 ♙xc6 30 axb6 axb6

Pachman points out that "White has apparently merely helped Black to achieve his strategic aim of obtaining a passed pawn from his queenside majority." But of course, isolated passed pawns can be either weak or strong, and Black's b-pawn and e-pawn are clearly weak here. By forcing Black to defend both points (see our later discussion of the 'two weakness' theory), Capablanca is eventually able to infiltrate Lasker's position and win:

31 ♙e1 ♙c8 32 ♘d2 ♘f8 33 ♘e4 ♙d8 34 h4 ♙c7 35 ♙b3 ♙g7 36 g3 ♙a7 37 ♙c4 ♙a5 38

♖c3 ♖xc3 39 ♜xc3 ♜f7 40 ♜e3 ♜d6 41 ♜e4
 ♜a4 42 ♜b7+ ♜g6 43 ♜c8 ♜b4 44 ♜c1 ♜e7
 45 ♜d3+ ♜h6 46 ♜c7 ♜a1+ 47 ♜g2 ♜d6 48
 ♜xf8+ 1-0

In a broader sense, any time two pawns advance against three, or one against two, we have a minority attack. In books, the concept at some point became narrower. Pachman acknowledged in 1960 that “nowadays we use the term [minority attack] to refer mainly to the strategic attack used in various lines of the Queen’s Gambit”. For readers who aren’t familiar with the structure he refers to, it arises, for example, after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♖c3 ♖f6 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♜g5 ♜e7 6 e3 ♖bd7 7 ♜d3 c6 (D):



As is described in great detail in the standard texts, White’s minority attack consists of b4-b5. Then if Black plays ...c5, dxc5 will leave him with an isolated d-pawn. The move ...cxb5 also leaves Black’s d-pawn isolated, and results in a position in which Black’s a- and b-pawns are rather exposed. For example, if after ...cxb5/♜xb5, Black plays ...b6 to defend his b-pawn against attack down the newly-opened b-file, then White can play a4-a5 (another minority attack!) and expose new weaknesses. Finally, if Black allows bxc6/...bxc6, Black’s c-pawn is backward and weak on an open file. The last option is the most common one once White achieves b5. As Pachman says of a game in which Keres played ...♜d7 and after bxc6, ...♜xc6: “In almost all positions of this type, it is a mistake to retake on c6 with a piece: a pawn on c6 can generally be defended more easily than the weak pawns on b7 and d5.” This is an

observation that remains true to this day. In the Tarrasch Defence to the Queen’s Gambit, for example, the main-line Rubinstein Variation goes 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♖c3 c5 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♖f3 ♖c6 6 g3 ♖f6 7 ♜g2 ♜e7 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♜g5 cxd4 10 ♖xd4. Now after a few moves, Black often plays ...♜d7; but when White plays ♖xc6, it is still correct to recapture by ...bxc6 and not ...♜xc6. Hundreds of games have shown that the position after the former recapture has more inherent strength and dynamic potential. Finally, the reader is referred to the Part 2, Chapter 3 section on backward pawns, for some rather surprising statistics on how well Black does with this backward ...c6/...d5 pawn structure.

How has the minority attack evolved in modern chess? I would say in two contrary directions:

a) To a large extent, this Queen’s Gambit Exchange Variation was worked out between 1930 and 1970. Several interesting defences to this minority attack, and counter-plans for White, were developed and played extensively. As a consequence, the best ways of playing for White and Black became well known. In fact, for the most part, White has switched to a number of other ways of approaching these positions (we discuss central expansion via f3 and e4 elsewhere in this book, for example). To my mind, as this particular form of double d-pawn opening continues to decline in frequency, the extreme attention devoted to it in the books has become out-of-date;

b) The only marked advance in the theory of minority attacks that I can think of has been associated with the black minority advance in the Sicilian Defence and similar structures. Indeed, the Sicilian Defence minority attack was known in the 1920s, but not so much so that books made mention of it. Later, with the Sicilian Defence explosion, that minority attack became one of the main reasons why White felt obliged to launch attacks at an early stage against Black’s position (I am speaking of Open Sicilians, of course, characterized by 2 ♖f3 and 3 d4). Since there are literally thousands of examples of Black’s minority-attack strategy, I thought I’d use a few by GM Pal Benko, whom I watched for many years playing successful minority attacks on an almost routine basis:

Shipman – Benko

USA 1958

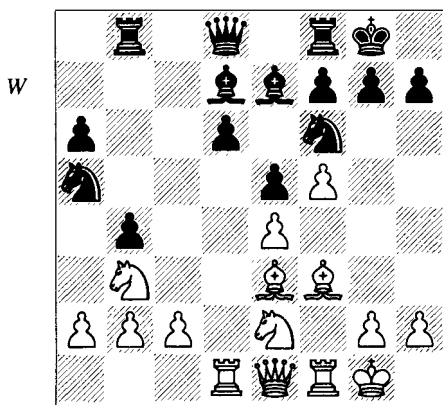
1 e4 c5 2 d3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 dxd4 d6 5 dxc3
e6 6 dxe2 dxc6 7 dxe3

A similar version of Black's attack was seen in Reyes-Benko, Lugano Olympiad 1968: 7 0-0 a6 8 a4 dxe7 9 h1 0-0 10 f4 c7 11 f3 d8 12 b3 b6 13 e1 b8 14 dxe3 a5 15 d1 dxc4 16 c1 b5 17 axb5 axb5 18 d2 e5 19 g3 b7 20 d3 b4 21 d5 dxd5 22 exd5 e4 (isolating and winning the d-pawn) 23 dxe2 d6 24 d4 dxf5 25 f5 d6 26 d5 c5 27 dxf6 dxf6 28 f4 d6 29 h4 d7 30 h3 d6 31 dxc6 cxc6 32 c1 d5 33 d1 c5 34 g4 cxc2 35 e3 h6 36 g1 d5 37 f2 d2 38 g5 hxg5 39 h5 f6 40 g2 d3 41 xe4 e8 42 f3 g4 43 xg4 xg4 44 c4+ d5 0-1. White hardly ever seemed in the game.

7... dxe7 8 0-0 0-0 9 f4 d7 10 d3 a6 11 f3 b8 12 e1 b5

The start of the minority attack. It sweeps away White's queenside defences in short order.

13 d1 b4 14 d2 e5 15 f5 a5! (D)



The idea of ...a5-a4 could also be used, but Black wants to tie White down with moves like ...b5 and ...d4, followed by ...a5-a4. White wants to attack, so he abandons his queenside for the sake of a desperate advance on the kingside. This trade-off – being subjected to attack in exchange for winning on the queenside – is also characteristic of the Queen's Gambit Exchange Variation minority attack.

16 dxa5 xa5 17 g4 fc8! 18 g5 d8 19 d2 xa2 20 d3 d8 21 d5 xb2 22 g3

xc3 23 g4 a3 24 e1 b3 25 g6 fxg6 26 fxg6 xe3! 27 gxh7+ xh7 28 ex3 xg4 29 xg4 c1+ 30 d1 b2 31 e1 xd1 32 dxd1 a5

The end of Black's fine combination; he will recover his material and then some by running the a-pawn down the board. The rest is easy:

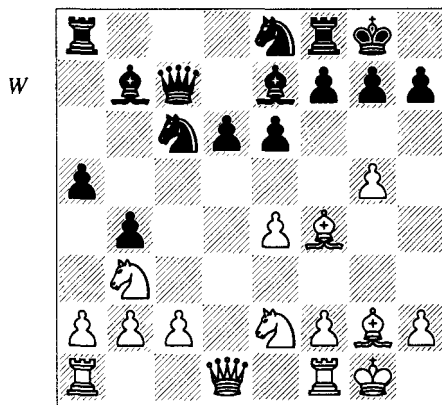
33 d3 a4 34 d2 c8 35 c3 a3 36 b1 b8 37 d1 bxc1 38 excl a8 39 a1 d6 40 a2 dxe4 41 ca1 d5 42 c1 c8 43 ac2 xc3 44 xc3 dxc3 45 xc3 a2 46 c1 c5+ 47 g2 d4 48 f3 a1 49 xa1 xa1 50 g4 g6 0-1

Here's another Benko game, this time illustrating a pure form of minority attack:

Conrady – Benko

Dublin 1957

1 e4 c5 2 d3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 dxd4 a6 5 d3 c7 6 d2 d6 7 0-0 d7 8 d3 b5 9 f3 d6 10 g3 0-0 11 f4 d6 12 g2 b7 13 g4 b4 14 g5 d8 15 d2 a5 (D)



Black simply drives away the pieces and then uses his c-file pressure.

16 d3 a4 17 d2 d4 18 c1 a3 19 b3 c8 20 d4 b5 21 g4 d3 22 f1 xa2 23 a1 d3 24 e3 e5 25 d5 exf4 26 h3 dxe4 0-1

What other minority attacks are common in modern chess? A familiar one occurs against the Sicilian Defence, Maroczy Bind structures (c4 and e4, without a d-pawn), which also arise from Hedgehog openings. Black attempts to

achieve ...a6 and ...b5, a minority attack to chip away at White's bind. If White has to accede to the exchange cxb5/...axb5, Black may then follow up with ...b4, to immobilize and target White's a-pawn. One of White's best responses to this plan can be to utilize his own *majority*, a subject to which we now turn.

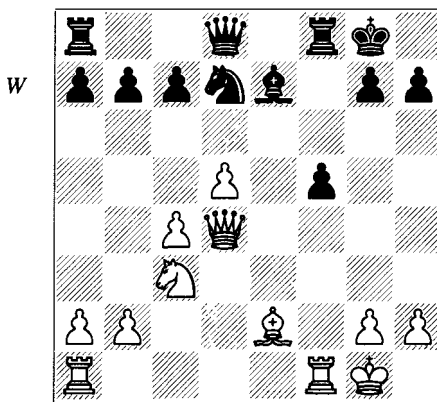
Majorities and Candidates

Steinitz first drew attention to the subject of pawn majorities as a separate element of the game. For years thereafter, teachers and theoreticians put great stock in majorities, and in particular, in the queenside majority, which was supposed to be a significant advantage. How often have we read an annotator saying that one side or another has an advantage due to his queenside majority? But as chess has evolved, the value of the queenside majority has become controversial. For one thing, we have just seen positions in which a minority is more effective than a majority. Furthermore, the advance of a majority will often simply expose weaknesses behind the very pawns which have advanced.

It is interesting to look at majorities in terms of the passed pawns they potentially create. This is the traditional reason for liking queenside pawn majorities, i.e., that a passed pawn created from it in the ending will be an outside passed pawn, far from the reach of the kings (which are presumably on the kingside). An associated reason is given by Pachman: "In the middlegame, [the queenside pawns] are easier to advance without weakening one's own king position." In other words, both sides may be able to create passed pawns, but the player with the queenside majority will be able to do so earlier and with less risk. He adds: "A queenside majority shows to best and lasting advantage in positions where ... the reduced material has cut out the danger of an attack on one's own king. This is usually the case in the transition stage between middlegame and ending."

That's pretty much the traditional view. One of Nimzowitsch's contributions was in focusing on the mobility of pawn majorities, i.e., to point out that majorities are only useful to the extent that they are mobile. He also systematically worked at restricting the mobility of majorities in his own games. In the following

example, Colle seems to be thinking along the same lines:



Spielmann – Colle
Dortmund 1928

Black threatens ...♙c5. White's next move not only prevents this, but prepares for the later advance of his majority by c5.

17 ♖a4 b5!

At the cost of a pawn, Black now cripples that majority. One feels that Nimzowitsch would approve. As Pachman points out, White's two extra pawns on the queenside are very difficult to convert into a passed pawn, and Black's bishop gains a beautiful post on d6, aiming at the kingside. Suddenly, too, the knight on the rim (a4) is out of the action, and Black's opposite-colour bishop has no counterpart on the side with *his* majority. In short, Black has full compensation for his pawn.

18 cxb5 ♙d6 19 ♖a1 ♗e7! 20 ♙d3 ♙e5 21 ♙h1 f4

This unopposed pawn threatens to cause damage by ...f3. White's play now deteriorates, but his defence was difficult in any case.

22 ♖e2?! ♖a68

With the tactical point 23 ♖xf4? ♖xf4 24 ♗xf4 ♙xd3 25 ♖xe7 ♖xe7, etc.

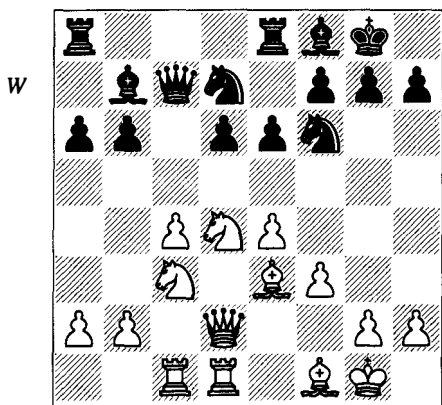
23 ♙c3 ♗h4 24 ♙e4?

Probably not best, but it may be too late, since 24 ♙e4 ♙g4 25 h3 f3 26 ♙xf3 fails to 26...♗g3 27 ♗g1 ♙c5. This is a typical case of opposite-coloured bishops favouring the attacker.

24...♙g4 25 h3 f3 26 ♖xf3 ♖xf3 27 ♙f6+ ♙f7 0-1

Today, the *theory* of the queenside majority has changed very little, but its relative importance has declined. Modern openings abound in which one side or the other voluntarily accepts a queenside minority; such minorities may even constitute an advantage as late as the early stages of the endgame. Another serious consideration is that acquiring a queenside majority tends to mean ceding a central majority. An obvious case of this is on the white side of the Sicilian Defence (which we have already mentioned), as well as in many variations of the 1 c4 e5 English Opening in which, after ...d5, White plays cxd5 and operates with his a- and b-pawns against Black's majority. To give a couple of concrete examples in other openings, take the French Defence after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 d2 c5 4 exd5 dxd5 5 d2 gf3 cxd4 6 dxc4 d6 7 0-0 dxc6 8 d2b3 d2f6 9 d2bxd4, and the Caro-Kann line which goes 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 d2c3 dxe4 4 d2xe4 d2d7 5 d2c4 d2gf6 6 d2g5 e6 7 d2e2 d2b6 8 d2d3 h6 9 d2f5f3 c5 10 d2xc5 d2xc5.

Nevertheless, one can still find examples of effective queenside majorities. In the Modern Benoni, for example, the advance of Black's a-, b-, and c-pawns (his majority) is essential to his success in nearly every line. Or, in the Hedgehog, consider this typical position (D):



Polugaevsky – Ljubojević
Bugojno 1980

Elsewhere in this book, we will see how White plays similar positions with b3, c4, and e4 versus this Hedgehog structure, but has trouble dealing with Black's latent dynamism (see especially Part 2). Here, however, White's

pieces are well-placed for a more ambitious plan, the activation of his majority:

15 b4! d2ac8 16 a3 d2b8 17 d2b3 h6 18 d2f2

Notice that White's point is not so much the creation of a passed pawn as it is direct pressure on Black's queenside, eventually opening lines there.

18...d2c6 19 h3 d2e7 20 d2b1 d2c7 21 d2dc1 d2a7 22 a4!

A real majority attack commences. Now a5 is a major threat, but something like 22...d2b8 23 a5 bxa5 24 d2xa5 d2a8 25 c5! is ultimately hopeless for Black, so he strikes back in the centre:

22...d2d5 23 exd5 exd5 24 a5 d2xb4 25 axb6 d2b8 26 c5

So Black has maintained material equality, but his weak a-pawn and White's two connected passed pawns give the first player a clear advantage.

26...d2b7 27 d2d4 d2e6??

Black neglects his trapped bishop, but 27...d2xc3 28 d2xc3 would be excruciating to defend. The rest is straightforward:

28 d2a2 d2a3 29 d2c3 d2d8 30 d2a5 d2xc5 31 d2xc5 d2xc5 32 d2xc5 d4 33 d2xb7 d2xb7 34 d2c7 d2b8 35 d2xb7 d2xb7 36 d2c8+ d2h7 37 d2d3+ g6 38 d2c7 d2bxb6 39 d2xf7+ d2g8 40 d2b7 d2xb1+ 41 d2xb1 1-0

Finally, the worm will occasionally turn even in the Sicilian:

Anand – Kasparov

*PCA World Ch match (game 9),
New York 1995*

1 e4 c5 2 d2f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 d2xd4 d2f6 5 d2c3 a6 6 d2e2 e6 7 0-0 d2e7 8 a4 d2c6 9 d2e3 0-0 10 f4 d2c7 11 d2h1 d2e8 12 d2f3 d2d7 13 d2b3 d2a5 14 d2xa5 d2xa5 15 d2d3 d2ad8 16 d2fd1 d2c6

A fairly typical Sicilian Defence position. White hasn't even started his usual kingside probes by f5 or g4-g5, so one would think that Black is sitting pretty. But Anand's eye is on the other flank:

17 b4! d2c7 18 b5 d2d7 19 d2ab1!

This is a truly unusual use of the majority. White's point here is to open lines for his pieces and expose Black's weaknesses on the queenside.

19...axb5 20 ♖xb5 ♙xb5

Black cedes the two bishops. Anand preferred 20...♗a5! 21 ♖xd6 ♙xa4, leading to a small advantage for White.

21 ♗xb5 ♖a8 22 c4

Using the whole queenside contingent of pawns. Now e5 threatens.

22...e5 23 ♙b6 ♗c8 24 fxe5 dxe5 25 a5 ♙f8 26 h3 ♗e6 27 ♖d5!

A beautiful move, of a type we will examine in Part 2 ('The Exchange Sacrifice'). White adds to his pressure on e5 and along the d-file, and provokes the following mistake:

27...♖xd5? 28 exd5 ♗g6 29 c5

With two bishops and such powerful mobile pawns, White has all the chances. In what follows, Black tries to counterattack on the king-side, but falls short:

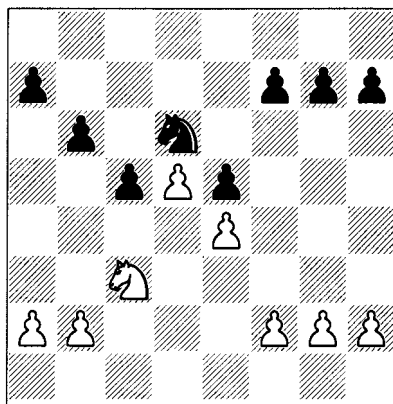
29...e4 30 ♙e2 ♖e5 31 ♗d7! ♖g5 32 ♖g1 e3 33 d6 ♖g3 34 ♗xb7 ♗e6 35 ♖h2! 1-0

Grandmasters take note of such ideas; a recent example was de Firmian-Åkesson, Reykjavik 1998: 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 a6 5 ♖c3 d6 6 a4 ♖c6 7 ♙e3 ♖f6 8 ♙e2 ♖xd4 9 ♗xd4 ♙d7 10 0-0 ♙c6 11 b4!? ♙e7 12 b5! ♙d7 13 f4 ♗c7?! 14 e5 ♖c8 15 bxa6! bxa6 16 ♙xa6 ♗xc3 17 ♙xc8 ♗xc8 18 exf6 ♙xf6 19 ♗xd6 ♙xa1 20 ♙c5! and White was winning (20...♙f6 21 ♖b1! is too strong). The beginnings of a trend? Perhaps; but it will take thousands of such games to make up for years of unsuccessful minority attacks by Black in this opening.

Passed Pawns and the Blockade

One of Nimzowitsch's most important contributions to chess theory involved passed pawns and blockading principles. He related pawn majorities to the creation of passed pawns in a more concrete manner than previous writers, and investigated the blockade of passed pawns so created. What he emphasized, and what remains true to this day, is that passed pawns could be either weak or strong to the extent that they were able to be restrained and blockaded. His playful characterization of the passed pawn's "lust to expand" remains one of the

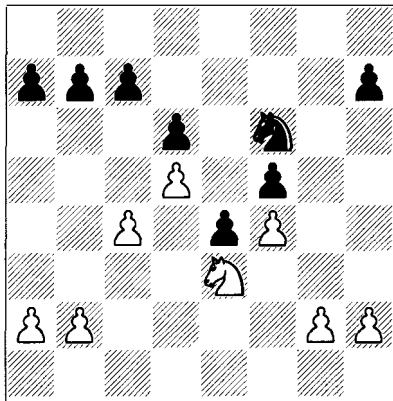
most potent and relevant images in chess theory. What it reflects is the enormous damage such a pawn can do when unleashed, even by sacrificing itself; more on this in the next section. But Nimzowitsch's real contribution involved the concept of blockade. Thanks to him, players today, when facing a passed pawn on e5 or d5, instinctively think in terms of a blockade with a knight on e6 or d6. Nimzowitsch first pointed out what an ideal blockader such a knight was, since it could perform its function and at the same time hit key squares in the enemy camp. This classic formation can arise from any number of openings (D):



I have ignored the placement of the queens, rooks, and other minor pieces. White has a protected passed pawn and no weaknesses. Traditionally, this in and of itself was considered an advantage. But the ideal placement of Black's knight can balance or in some cases even outweigh White's passed pawn. This is because the knight firmly blockades the pawn, attacks e4 and c4, and also supports both the undermining move ...f5 and the expansion of the majority by ...b5. There are some variations on this theme, for example, in some cases, White has a pawn on c4, in which case the move ...b5 becomes an undermining move. Or both sides can be without a c-pawn, in which case Black's knight is still difficult to dislodge.

Another standard example of this idea, but from the white point of view, arises in the King's Indian Defence (and other 1 d4 openings), when Black plays ...f5, and White counters by exf5/...gxf5/f4. If Black then plays ...e4 (with a protected passed pawn), White would

ideally like a knight on e3, to control f5 and d5, blockade the passed pawn, and support the undermining advance g4. Here is a typical skeletal structure:



Nimzowitsch went into great detail to explain which pieces were the best and worst blockaders, and in which contexts there were exceptions. He extended this concept of blockade to the general restriction of the mobility of the opponent's pawns, whether they were passed, part of a majority, or simply threats to advance. Although players today are much more aware of and more skilled at implementing blockades than the players of Nimzowitsch's day, his concepts have not been improved upon, in my opinion. Here's a well-known example from Pachman's play which also brings up a few peripheral issues:

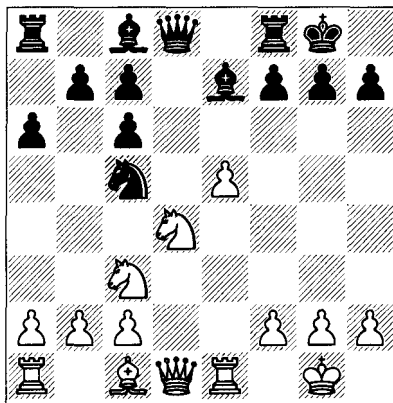
Vesely – Pachman

Prague 1951

1 e4 e5 2 d3 c6 3 b5 a6 4 a4 d6 5 d4 exd4 6 0-0 e7 7 e5 d4 8 dxd4 0-0 9 e1 c5 10 dxc6 dxc6 11 d3 (D)

This is a fairly standard structure (which could arise from the Ruy Lopez Exchange Variation, for example) in which Black's two bishops are pitted against White's better pawn structure. Black has what is called a 'crippled majority' on the queenside, in that its advance will not lead to the creation of a passed pawn, whereas White's majority does have a passed pawn 'candidate' (in Nimzowitsch's terminology) in the e5-pawn, since f4-f5 and e6 can follow. But there is a much more important facet

B



to White's majority: after f4-f5, Black's pieces will be terribly restricted, and White will have excellent attacking chances, both by piece play (f4, g4, a1, f3, etc.) and by using his pawns as a battering ram (f5-f6, h4-h5-h6). These threats, and not that of a white passed pawn, drive Pachman to play his next move.

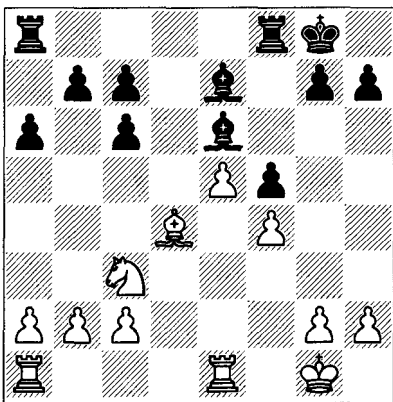
11...f5!

In fact, Black just gives White a passed pawn for free! But this pawn can be blockaded from the e6-square (with either a knight or bishop), and in addition, Black now stakes out space and gets to play on both wings.

12 dce2

Pachman had an earlier game (Foltys-Pachman, Czechoslovakia 1946) in which his opponent rushed to get a 'protected passed pawn' by 12 f4?!. Today, very few players would consider this move, which makes his dark-squared bishop a bad piece and even sets up a target for a later black break by ...g5. The game went 12...d6 13 e3 dxd4 14 dxd4 dxd4 15 dxd4 e6 (D).

W



Pachman calls White's game "strategically lost, for he has no effective counterplay against the advance of Black's queenside pawns". Implicit in this assessment is an acknowledgement of the great superiority of Black's bishops in such a position. This game snippet is a good example of how the whole idea that protected passed pawns are an advantage in and of themselves has disappeared. As so often, an idea which is a force in an endgame (protected passed pawns tend to be decisive in king-and-pawn endgames, for example) tends not to apply in the middlegame (where the same pawns are often just a static obstruction). The text move, 12 ♖ce2, makes sense, to challenge Black's blockade by ♖f4. As Pachman points out, 12 exf6 (e.p.) was also possible, but it would free Black's bishops. Finally, 12 e6? ♙f6 virtually forces 13 ♖xf5, but again, Black's bishops would be very active in the open position arising after 13...♙xe6.

12...♙e6 13 ♖xe6 ♜xd1 14 ♜xd1 ♙xe6 15 ♖f4?!

Pachman prefers 15 ♖d4 here, when he points out two interesting lines: 15...♙f7 16 ♖xe6 ♙xe6, when the king is an ideally centralized blockader; and "15...♙c8! 16 b3 (16 ♙e3 f4) 16...g5! followed by ...c5 and ...♙e6". This last line ought to favour the second player.

15...♜ad8 16 ♙e3 ♙c8 17 ♖d3 b6

Now Black is ready for ...♙e6, ...c5, ...g5 and general expansion supported by the bishops. That would be utterly depressing for White, so he tries to prevent ...c5:

18 b4!? f4!

Activating the bishops, and incidentally forcing weaknesses in White's position.

19 ♖xf4 ♙xb4 20 ♖e2 ♙f5

Now the bishops just mop up:

21 c3 ♙a5 22 ♜ac1 c5 23 f3 ♙e6 24 ♙f2 ♙c4 25 ♖f4 ♜fe8 26 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 27 a3 ♜e8 28 e6 ♙xe6 29 ♖xe6 ♜xe6 30 c4 ♙f7 31 ♙f4 b5 32 ♙e3 ♙b6 33 cxb5 axb5 34 ♜b1 c4 35 ♙xb6 ♜xb6 36 ♙e3 c5 37 ♙e4 ♙e6 0-1

The Lustful Contemporary Passed Pawn

Naturally, passed pawns which are created as the endgame approaches can be a winning

advantage. Major-piece endings, for example (ones with queens and rooks) are notoriously decided in favour of the side with the more effective and/or more advanced passed pawn. From the standpoint of modern middlegame theory, the more interesting issue concerns the role of passed pawns earlier in the game. When I was growing up, annotators would often point to the creation of a passed pawn right out of the opening and state that the side possessing it had an advantage, the more so if it was a protected passed pawn. As the years went on, players began to realize that the 'advantage' of a passed pawn was largely a late middlegame and endgame phenomenon; and that very often, the creation of an early passed pawn brought other problems with it. There are few modern openings, for example, which are geared towards the creation of a passed pawn. Normally such a pawn, especially on the flank, is fairly easily blockaded in the early-to-middle parts of the game, and a well-blockaded passed pawn (especially if isolated) is often a serious weakness. Suba, as we will mention in Part 2, believes that outside passed pawns tend to be weaknesses in the middlegame, and we will cite evidence to support that.

At this point, I want to look at an example of the fight of *two* outside passed pawns versus a central majority:

Salov – M. Gurevich

Leningrad 1987

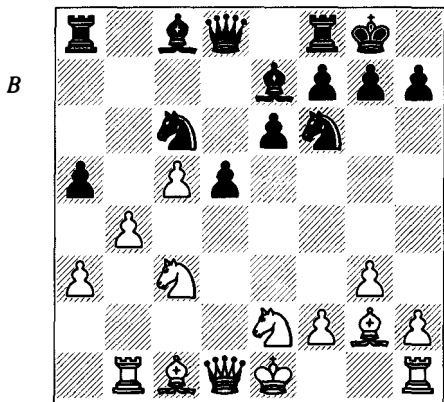
1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♖c3 ♙b4 4 e3 c5 5 ♖e2 cxd4 6 exd4 d5 7 a3 ♙e7 8 c5 0-0 9 g3 b6 10 b4 bxc5 11 dxc5 a5 12 ♜b1 ♖c6! 13 ♙g2 (D)

Note that 13 b5? loses the c-pawn after 13...♖e5, threatening mate on f3.

At first glance, White's two advanced and connected passed pawns look scary, but as so often, the owner of the mobile centre pawns (who is also somewhat better developed) has plenty of play to counterbalance them.

13...♜b8!

Now Black will play tactically to prevent the further advance of the passed pawns. Always in the background is his own threat to expand in the centre. Here are a few earlier game segments which are also very instructive in showing how White's pawns are more imposing



optically than in reality. 13...axb4 14 axb4 ♖b8 15 ♕a3 and now:

a) 15...♕d7!? 16 0-0 (16 b5 ♕a5 17 0-0 ♖c4!) 16...♕a7 17 ♖e1 ♕e8! and although this is unclear, White's pawns are blockaded, and the e8-knight can go to c7 and cover b5, Gligorić-Szabo, Helsinki Olympiad 1952.

b) 15...♕a6! 16 0-0 (16 b5? ♖a5) 16...♕c4 (the bishop gets out in front of the onrushing pawns) 17 ♖e1 ♖c7 is unclear, M.Gurevich-Lerner, Tallinn 1987.

14 ♕f4!?

This doesn't work out well, but the alternative ways of defending the b-pawn are also not promising, for example, 14 b5 ♕xc5! 15 bxc6 ♖xb1 16 ♖xb1 ♖b6 with a strong attack, e.g., 17 ♖bc3 ♕xf2+ 18 ♖f1 ♖g4. Or 14 ♖d4 ♖xd4 15 ♖xd4 ♖d7 16 0-0 ♕a6 17 ♖d1 ♕f6 18 ♖d2 axb4 19 axb4 ♕e5 and Black had the initiative in Marin-Portisch, Interzonal tournament, Szirak 1987.

14...axb4! 15 ♕xb8 bxc3 16 ♖a4?

Black's exchange sacrifice has destroyed White's only asset, his queenside pawns, and he reacts poorly. Apparently best was 16 ♕d6 ♕xd6 17 cxd6 ♖a5! 18 0-0 ♖xa3 19 ♖c2 ♖xd6, when Black is only somewhat better.

16...♖xb8 17 ♖xb8 ♖d7! 18 ♖a8 ♖xc5 19 ♖b5

A nice line is 19 ♖d4 ♖b6! 20 ♖xc3 ♖b7! 21 ♖a5 ♖b3, as given by Gurevich. The rest is straightforward:

19...♖d6! 20 ♕f3 ♕a6 21 ♖xf8+ ♕xf8 22 ♖a5 ♖d3+ 23 ♖f1 ♕e5 24 ♖xc3 d4 25 ♖b3 ♕c4 0-1

In view of the continuation 26 ♖b7 ♖xf3 27 ♖xf3 ♕d5.

In contemporary chess, the most effective passed pawns tend to arise from the advance of a central majority, and their fate depends upon the activity achieved by the pieces around them. One of the few modern openings which consistently gives rise to a passed-pawn struggle is the Grünfeld Defence. The issues involved are characteristic.

Novikov – Tukmakov

USSR Ch, Lvov 1984

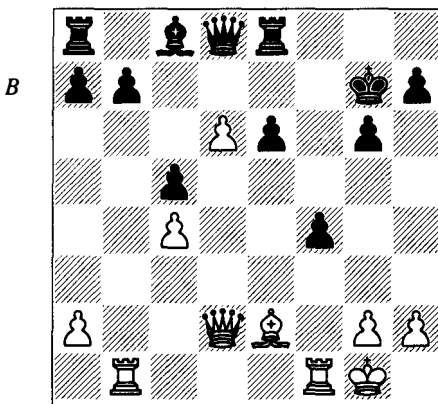
1 d4 ♖f6 2 ♖f3 g6 3 c4 ♕g7 4 ♖c3 d5 5 cxd5 ♖xd5 6 e4 ♖xc3 7 bxc3 c5 8 ♖b1 0-0 9 ♕e2 ♖c6 10 d5 ♕e5 11 ♖xe5 ♕xe5 12 ♖d2 e6 13 f4 ♕g7 14 c4

This opening brutally brings into conflict White's mega-centre and Black's undermining attempts. Since it is all theory, I leave this stage unannotated.

14...♖e8 15 e5 f6 16 d6!

The passed pawn appears, at the cost of a pawn.

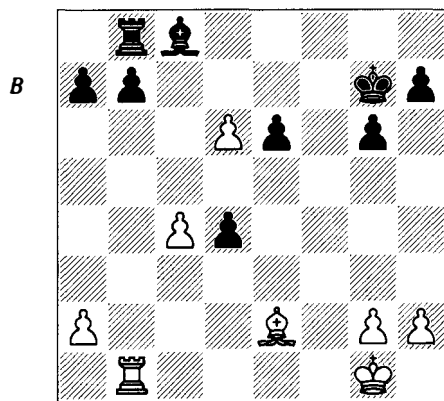
16...fxe5 17 ♕b2 exf4 18 ♕xg7 ♖xg7 19 0-0 (D)



19...♖f8

According to theory, 19...e5 20 d7! ♖xd7 21 ♖xd7+ ♕xd7 22 ♖xb7 ♖e7 23 ♖d1 ♖d8 24 ♕g4 leads to a winning position. At any rate, 20 d7! is certainly an excellent example of the passed pawn's 'lust to expand', and is typical, in that the pawn is ultimately sacrificed for the sake of material or attack. After 19...♖f8, White manages to simplify to a position with heavy pieces still on the board, which tends to favour the passed pawn. But he is still a pawn down:

20 ♖xf4 ♖xf4 21 ♗xf4 ♗f6 22 ♗e4! ♖b8 23 ♖f1! ♗d4+ 24 ♗xd4+ cxd4 25 ♖b1 (D)



25...♗d7

I wouldn't try to extract any 'rules' from this game! Whether a passed pawn such as the one on d6 is strong or weak depends upon the specifics of the position. For example, it's nice that White has the resource 25...e5 26 ♗f3 b6 27 c5 ♗f5 28 c6! ♗xb1 29 c7, winning.

26 ♗f3 b6 27 c5 ♖c8 28 c6!

As well as this final trick, which nets a piece for three pawns.

28...♗xc6 29 ♖c1 ♗d7 30 ♖xc8 ♗xc8 31 ♗c6 ♗f6 32 d7 ♗xd7 33 ♗xd7 e5 34 ♗f2 e4 35 ♗c6 ♗e5 36 h4!

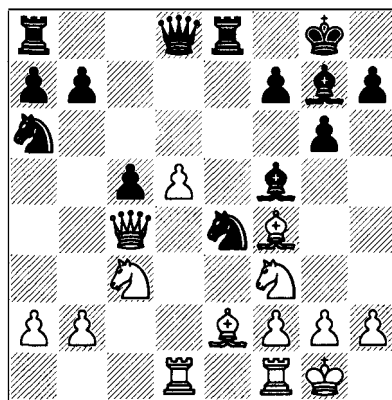
It's also nice that this endgame just happens to win for White. Of course, the entire sequence up to 36 h4 had actually been played before(!), and its follow-up had been worked out away from the board! But as an illustration of the passed pawn, it is superb. We get to see how powerful an unblockaded central passed pawn can be, and why Nimzowitsch wanted to put it under lock and key!

Karpov – Kasparov World Ch match (game 19th), London/Leningrad 1986

1 d4 ♗f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♗c3 d5 4 ♗f3 ♗g7 5 ♗b3 dxc4 6 ♗xc4 0-0 7 e4 ♗a6 8 ♗e2 c5 9 d5 e6 10 0-0 exd5 11 exd5 ♗f5 12 ♗f4 ♖e8 13 ♖ad1 ♗e4 (D)

Again, the issue revolves around White's d-pawn. Black threatens ...♗xc3 and ...♖e4, and the idea of blockading by ...♗d6 is also in the

W



air. Moves like 14 ♗d3 at the very least allow 14...♗xc3 15 bxc3 b5! 16 ♗xb5 ♗xc3 17 ♗xa6 ♗xd3 18 ♗xd3 ♗e2+, etc. So White sacrifices a pawn:

14 ♗b5!

Everything revolves around this pawn's lust! Thus d6 must be covered at all costs. Now Black declines the gift, figuring to lose too much time after 14...♗xb2 15 d6 ♗f6 16 ♗d3! with ♖fel coming next.

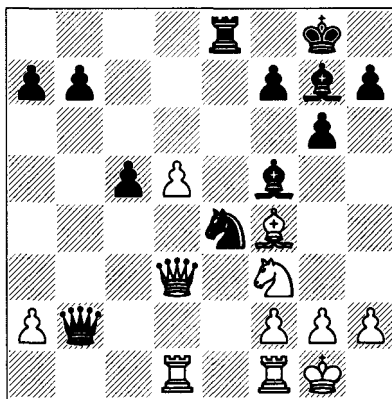
14...♗f6 15 ♗d3 ♗b4?!

A typically dynamic Kasparov solution, but in this case it happens to come up short. In later games Black gained equality with 15...♗d7 and 15...♖ad8, indicating that the passed pawn, at least at this point, does not necessarily confer an advantage.

16 ♗c7 ♗xd3 17 ♗xe8 ♖xe8 18 ♗xd3 ♗xb2 (D)

Unfortunately for Black, discoveries are useless, e.g. 18...♗xf2? 19 ♗b5.

W

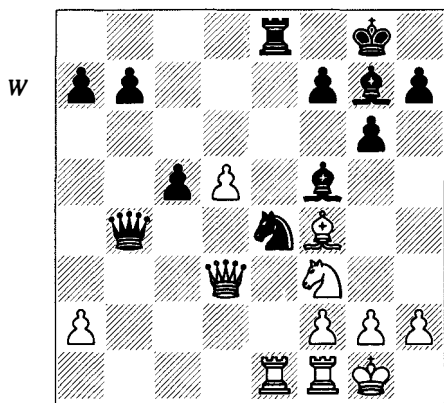


19 ♖de1!?

Passed pawn should be pushed ... if and when the tactics work! The correct move was 19 d6! ♖d8! 20 ♖e3 h5 21 ♖b1 ♖xa2 22 ♖xb7 ♖d5 23 ♖xa7 ♖xd6 24 ♖xd6 ♖xd6 25 ♖g5, when White has the advantage, although the two bishops offer some counterplay. In this line, once again, the proud pawn was ultimately given away for activity.

19...♖b4? (D)

A last mistake, as if anyone could really figure out what was going on here over the board. The right move was 19...♖xa2! 20 ♖b5 ♖d8 21 ♖xb7 ♖xd5 22 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 with equality, in view of the trick 23 g4 ♖f6!.



20 ♖d2! ♖a4 21 ♖c4 ♖xc4 22 ♖xc4 ♖c3

23 ♖d2 ♖xd2 24 ♖xd2 ♖d7 25 ♖f4! ♖b5 26 f3! g5

The power of the passed pawn in simplified positions is once again shown after 26...♖xf1 27 ♖xf1 ♖f6 28 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 29 ♖e5! f6 30 d6! and White wins.

27 ♖xg5 ♖xf1

Also hopeless was 27...♖xg5 28 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 29 h4. As the game goes, we see the power of a bishop supporting the monster on d5:

28 ♖xf1 ♖d6 29 ♖e7 ♖c8 30 ♖xc5 ♖d8 31 ♖e5 f6 32 ♖f5 b6 33 ♖d4 ♖e7 34 ♖xf6 ♖xd5 35 ♖g5+ ♖xg5 36 ♖xg5 ♖c6 37 ♖e2 ♖f7 38 ♖d3 ♖e6 39 ♖c4 ♖e5+ 40 ♖d4 ♖c6+ 41 ♖c4 1-0

As you might imagine, there are also plenty of examples in the Grünfeld Defence of isolated passed d-pawns which are blockaded and eventually become weak. Although nothing revolutionary has occurred in the area of passed-pawn theory, I believe that the gradual realization of the power of the blockade has led to a demotion of the passed pawn's status as an independent advantage in the opening or early middlegame. Whether it does constitute an advantage is completely dependent upon how firmly the defender keeps it under restraint, and a host of other more important factors involving piece placement, activity, and the like.

4 Pawns: In Chains and Doubled Up

This chapter continues our look at pawns. This time we look at two areas with which Nimzowitsch was particularly concerned: pawn-chains and doubled pawns. The reader should keep in mind that these are subjects which will be taken up in a very modern context in Part 2; the discussion of pawn-chains there is particularly important. Here I just want to set the scene and have a look at some traditional issues.

Nimzowitsch's New Ideas

The first thing we should point out about Nimzowitsch's exposition on pawn-chains is that he was mostly concerned with the structure that arises from the French Defence Advance Variation: 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5. There is a good reason for this: his 'born enemy' Tarrasch had given 3 e5 a '?'. In Nimzowitsch's own words, his "attempt at resuscitating" 3 e5 was aimed at the purpose of "undermining Tarrasch's ... position" and "slowly but surely weakened the position of the Nuremberg champion". This was no idle sideline for Nimzowitsch; he also bragged about how his discovery of the Nimzo-Indian and Queen's Indian "conclusively destroyed ... the position of Tarrasch as a generally acknowledged teacher of chess understanding". He even recommends that everyone find a born enemy to improve one's play!

Well, of course, the Nimzo-Indian and Queen's Indian are still two of the most irritating openings to play against that man has ever invented. Today, in fact, these two brainchildren of Nimzowitsch probably frustrate players of 1 d4 more than any other defence. But the French Advance Variation has never really caught on among the top players, despite the occasional mini-revival, and certainly not in the way Nimzowitsch played it. Nevertheless, his exposition (and his examples) to this day dominate the instructional and middlegame books.

Let's take a look at his most famous game with the French pawn-chain:

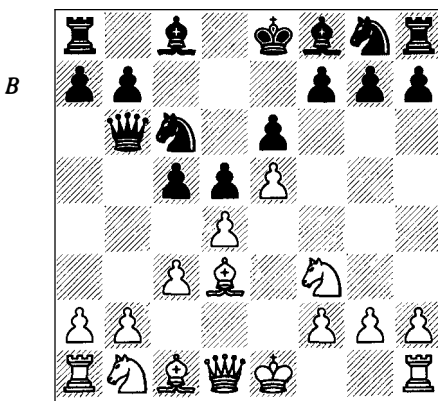
Nimzowitsch – Salwe

Karlsbad 1911

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5

Attacking the base of the pawn-chain (d4); Nimzowitsch was the first to enunciate this as a 'principle' of pawn-chains. He pronounced attacking the base of the chain (as opposed to the front, in this case at e5) 'a strategic necessity'. In fact, in this position, 3...c5 indeed makes more sense than 3...f6; but we shall see in Part 2 that attacking the base of a pawn-chain is by no means a necessary step, and that failing to destroy the base doesn't by any means foredoom an attack on the front.

4 c3 ♘c6 5 ♙f3 ♚b6 6 ♙d3 (D)



6...♙d7?!

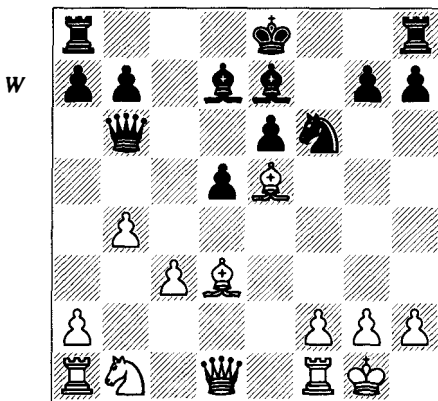
After this game, 6...cxd4 was considered better. Another famous game, Nimzowitsch-Tarrasch, San Sebastian 1912, with that move illustrates what we would now consider more conventional pawn-chain play: 7 cxd4 ♙d7 8 ♙e2 (a loss of tempo, showing why 6 ♙e2 – or 6 a3!? – is played today instead of 6 ♙d3; ironically, Tarrasch had commented many years before that this loss of tempo 'refuted' the opening, and that if the bishop couldn't take up its 'natural' post on d3, that White's whole system was refuted!) 8...♘ge7 9 b3 ♘f5 10 ♙b2 ♙b4+ 11 ♘f1, and here Nimzowitsch himself

indicated one promising continuation for Black: 11...0-0!? 12 g4 ♖h6 13 ♖g1 f6 14 exf6 ♖xf6 15 g5 ♖xf3 16 ♖xf3 ♖f5 17 ♖g4, and now by either 17...♖e8 or 17...♖f8, Black has more than enough for the exchange, since the white king is exposed, his d-pawn is hard to protect, and there are weaknesses all over the kingside. Instead, Tarrasch continued with 11...♖e7 12 g3 a5? 13 a4 ♖c8 14 ♖b5 ♖b4 15 ♖c3!, and White had secured control over b5 (assisting the support of d4) and was probably already slightly better. Ironically, despite Nimzowitsch's criticism of 11...♖e7, Black could have done very well with 12...0-0!, intending ...f6, since 13 h4 (13 g4 ♖h4) 13...f6 14 g4 ♖h6 15 exf6 ♖xf6! 16 g5 ♖xf3 17 ♖xf3 ♖f5 wins the d-pawn straight away with the better game. Such lines indicate why Nimzowitsch was not very successful at establishing 3 e5 as a popular move for White.

7 dxc5! ♖xc5 8 0-0 f6

"Black hungrily attacks the last remaining member of the once-proud white pawn-chain." (Nimzowitsch). In fact, 8...a5! (preventing White's next and considering ...a4 in several lines) is a much better move, and under-explored, due to the rarity of 6 ♖d3 ♖d7. But that is another story.

9 b4! ♖e7 10 ♖f4 fxe5 11 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 12 ♖xe5 ♖f6 (D)



White's whole conception was quite new at the time. In this respect, Nimzowitsch shared a fundamental belief with the other hyper-moderns: that the centre did *not* have to be occupied by pawns; rather, the central *squares* could be controlled by pieces. This seems so

laughably obvious now that it's hard to believe that it needed stating. And of course, confronted with the position before us, it's not as though the very best players, such as Tarrasch, Lasker or Capablanca, would have thrown up their hands in horror or preferred Black! But Nimzowitsch and the hypermoderns brought new notions about the centre into general consciousness: that one could 'surrender' the centre by moves such as dxc5 and exf6 (or in the case before us, by allowing ...fxe5, which is structurally the equivalent of exf6/...♖xf6) and still have the better central position; and that, similarly, one could control the centre from afar (with fianchettoed bishops, for example). One has to keep in mind that the exemplars for generations of players were the Evans Gambit, King's Gambit, Giuoco Piano (lines with 4 c3 and 5 d4) and other openings in which White achieved or at least strove for the 'ideal' centre with both e4 and d4 in. No one talked about controlling the squares e4 and d4; the goal was to *occupy* them. Thousands of exemplary and informal games with the same theme can do a lot towards closing minds!

13 ♖d2!

Rushing every available force to the control of d4 and e5.

13...0-0 14 ♖f3 ♖d6

Nimzowitsch points out that 14...♖b5 15 ♖d4 ♖a6 16 ♖xb5 ♖xb5, which wouldn't solve Black's problems in any case, loses the e-pawn after 17 ♖g5 (since ♖e1 can follow).

15 ♖e2 ♖ac8 16 ♖d4 ♖c7 17 ♖e5 ♖e8 18 ♖ae1

With total domination of the dark squares, and serious pressure down the e-file as well. White is winning.

18...♖xe5 19 ♖xe5 ♖c6 20 ♖d4 ♖d7 21 ♖c2 ♖f7 22 ♖e3

Switching to direct attack; this is a classic case of the player who controls the centre being able to transfer his forces to the attack more quickly than the opponent can defend.

22...b6 23 ♖g3 ♖h8 24 ♖xh7! e5

On 24...♖xh7, 25 ♖g6 leads to a quick mate, so White wins material and the game.

25 ♖g6 ♖e7 26 ♖e1 ♖d6 27 ♖e3 d4 28 ♖g5 ♖xc3 29 ♖xc3 dxc3 30 ♖xc3 ♖g8 31 a3 ♖f8 32 ♖h4 ♖e8 33 ♖f5 ♖d4 34 ♖xd4 exd4 35 ♖xe7 ♖xe7 36 ♖d3 ♖d6 37 ♖xf6 gxf6 38 h4 1-0

It is interesting to compare this game with another in which Nimzowitsch also 'surrendered' the base pawn in order to gain a central square, but things didn't turn out as well:

Nimzowitsch – Capablanca

New York 1927

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 ♟f5 4 ♟d3 ♟xd3 5 ♛xd3 e6 6 ♜c3!?

By ruling out support of d4 via c3, White makes his 8th move inevitable.

6... ♛b6 7 ♜ge2 c5 8 dxc5

Surrender of the centre; but this time he only gets a disputed d4-square, not the d4 and e5 domination of the last game.

8... ♟xc5 9 0-0 ♜e7

9... ♜d7!?

10 ♜a4 ♛c6 11 ♜xc5 ♛xc5 12 ♟e3 ♛c7 13 f4 ♜f5 14 c3 ♜c6 15 ♟ad1 g6!?

An odd move; I don't like it, but it provokes the following error:

16 g4?

Unbelievable for a sophisticated pawn player like Nimzowitsch; this leads to the huge weakness created on move 18. Simply 16 ♟f2 was fine, and equal.

16... ♜xe3 17 ♛xe3 h5

Of course.

18 g5 0-0 19 ♜d4 ♛b6 20 ♟f2 ♟fc8 21 a3?

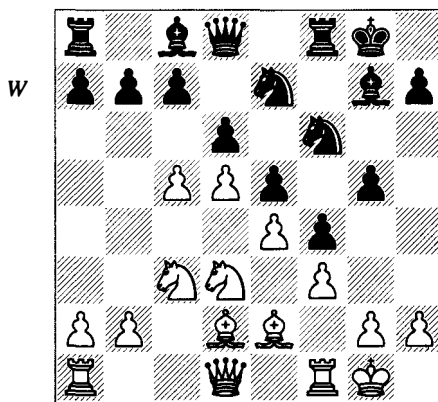
Also weakening; Nimzowitsch was often not himself against Capablanca.

21... ♟c7 22 ♟d3 ♜a5

...and Black was better due to his control of light squares and ability to pressure White via ...♟c4. But it took even more mistakes for White to lose the game.

Nimzowitsch's description of pawn-chain strategy still dominates the textbooks. But how are pawn-chains handled in practice today? On the one hand, his simple model of attacking the base of the chain still applies in some cases. For example, in the old main line of the King's Indian Defence (Classical Variation), this position has appeared hundreds (if not thousands) of times (D):

White idea is to attack the 'base' at d6 by c5 (actually, there are even cases in which he then tries to undermine the 'real' base at c7 by b4-b5-b6), whereas Black is attacking the 'base' at f3 by ...g4 (I can't think of a single case in



which he then had time to play ...h5-h4-h3 to undermine g2, however). This is very much à la Nimzowitsch. What we will see in Part 2, however, is that there are other ways of dealing with pawn-chains. Attacking the front of the pawn-chain, which Nimzowitsch condemned, is becoming increasingly popular in a number of openings. We will also examine how entirely different various pawn-chain openings (such as the French and King's Indian) are, once you consider which structures are playable and, for example, what roles the minor pieces play in each opening.

Nimzowitsch and Doubled Pawns

There will be scattered discussions of doubled pawns throughout this book; in this section, I would like to summarize briefly Nimzowitsch's contributions to this topic, before examining how the treatment of doubled pawns has evolved. In both his play and writings, Nimzowitsch did a great deal to modernize the treatment of doubled pawns. For one thing, he developed two openings, the Nimzo-Indian (1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♜c3 ♟b4) and French Winawer (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜c3 ♟b4), in which the move ...♟xc3 tended to create doubled pawns in a great many variations. Nimzowitsch developed a theory about the restraint of doubled pawns, considering them much like passed pawns, i.e., full of dynamic potential if they were allowed to remain mobile. These theories have survived mostly intact to this day. A couple of his games should clarify the major issues:

Janowsky – Nimzowitsch

St Petersburg 1914

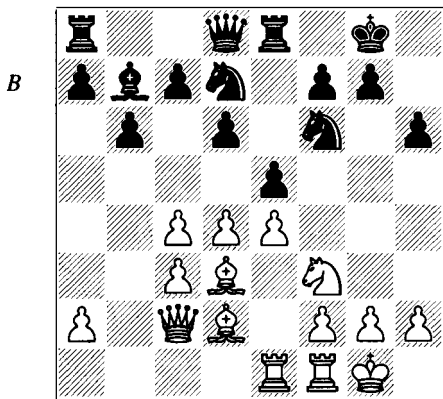
1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 e3 b6 5 ♙d3 ♙b7 6 ♘f3 ♙xc3+

Nimzowitsch took great delight in making this exchange without the gain of tempo which normally occurs when White plays a3. Although he expressed disdain for that tempo, modern players value it much more, and in very few variations does Black voluntarily play ...♙xc3 like this. The one striking exception is the Hübner Variation of the Nimzo-Indian, which will be discussed Part 2, Chapter 7; the move-order there is 4 e3 c5 5 ♙d3 ♘c6 6 ♘f3 ♙xc3+ 7 bxc3, which was the position from which Nimzowitsch won one of the most famous blockading games of all time (versus P.Johner in Dresden 1926).

7 bxc3 d6 8 ♖c2 ♘bd7 9 e4 e5

Now the position has taken on features typical of a Nimzo-Indian Defence. Please note the role of Black's c-pawn. If Black has to play ...c5 in order to force White to play d5, then White's queenside pawns will be hard to attack, e.g., Black won't be able to play ...♘c6-a5, ...♙a6, and ...♖d7-c6 to attack the forward c-pawn. On the other hand, if White plays d5 *without* being provoked by ...c5, Black gains two important advantages: a fine square c5 for his knights, and more importantly, the possibility of opening the position against White's queenside by ...c6. See the note to Black's 13th move.

10 0-0 0-0 11 ♙g5 h6 12 ♙d2 ♖e8 13 ♖ae1 (D)



13...♘h7

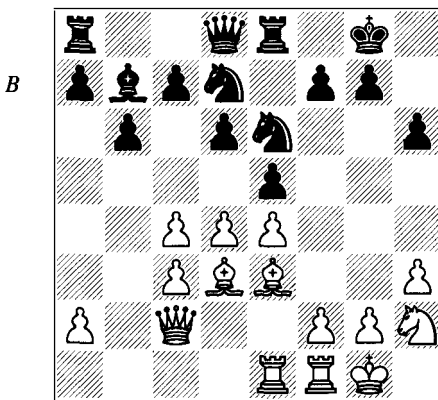
Beginning a subtle reorganization; Black plans ...♘hf8-e6 to centralize the knight. Nimzowitsch rightly spends a good deal of time on the options, commenting upon them in both *My System* and *Chess Praxis*. The idea is still that Black would like White to play d5 without ...c5 being in, since 13...c5?! 14 d5 gives White a free hand to prepare g3 and f4 with an attack. One move he suggests is 13...♖e6!?, when 14 d5 ♖e8 already threatens ...♘c5 and ...c6, for example 15 ♖e2 ♘c5 16 ♘e1 c6 17 g3 cxd5 18 cxd5 ♘xd3 19 ♘xd3 ♖c8. The point of this line is that White can liquidate his doubled c-pawns and still be left with a seriously backward pawn on an open file, an idea which applies to many positions and was first enunciated by Nimzowitsch. Of course, White might not so oblige, but rather choose something like 14 ♖e2 ♖e8 15 ♖fe1, as Nimzowitsch mentions. Here I suppose that 14...♖f8!? 15 ♖fe1 ♖ae8 16 ♘h4 g6 17 g3 ♖g7 might be a bit more flexible for Black, but one feels that White is still somewhat better after 18 ♘g2.

Finally, Nimzowitsch says that 13...♘f8 was also possible from the diagram, giving 14 h3 ♘g6 15 ♘h2 ♖e7, when 16 f4 exf4 17 ♙xf4 ♖e8 18 ♙xh6 ♘xe4 looks fine for Black, so something like 16 ♘g4 ♘xg4 17 hxg4 ♖d7 18 f3 might be preferred.

14 h3

I wonder about 14 g3 here, covering f4 from a knight incursion and preparing for ♘h4-f5 followed by f4. Then 14...♘g5 15 ♘h4 ♘f6 (15...♘e6 16 ♘f5) 16 f3 may well favour White.

14...♘hf8 15 ♘h2 ♘e6 16 ♙e3 (D)



16...c5!?

Nimzowitsch shows a typically modern flexibility; if he can't force d5 without playing ...c5, well, he'll play ...c5 anyway, but at a time when he has kingside prospects! Still, 16...♖f6! would be a sound alternative, intending 17 ♖g4 ♗h4.

17 d5 ♖f4 18 ♖e2?!

This turns out to be a poor reorganization, but Black has equalized in any case.

18...♖f8 19 ♖g4 ♖c8

Ironically, Black offers to exchange his 'good' bishop for White's 'bad' one; we will be talking in Part 2 about how deceptive and often useless those labels are. The rest of the game features all kinds of ideas which will be debated elsewhere in this book (prophylaxis, two knights versus the bishop-pair, good and bad bishops, etc.), but it is not relevant to our presentation here: 20 ♗d2 ♖a6 21 g3 ♖4g6 22 ♖e2 ♖h7 23 h4 ♖f6 24 ♖d3 ♗b8 25 ♗e2 ♗b7 26 ♖c1 ♗be7 27 ♖h1 ♖c8 28 ♖g1 ♖f8 29 h5 ♖h8 30 g4 ♖h7 31 ♖c2 ♗b7 32 f4 f6 33 fxe5 dxe5 34 ♖f3 ♖f7 35 ♗ef1 ♖g8 36 ♖h4 ♖d6 37 ♖f5 ♖xf5 38 gxf5 ♖g5, and Black's knights were superior to White's bishops, giving him a small but lasting advantage.

Marshall – Nimzowitsch

New York 1927

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♖c3 ♖b4

In the English-speaking world, we call this the Winawer Variation, but elsewhere it is called the 'Nimzowitsch Variation', recognizing the extent of his contribution. Tarrasch said of 3...♖b4: "This is well-known to be no good, because it will lead to an unfavourable exchange or retreat." We may assume that Nimzowitsch had done a thorough study of White's next move (which is not considered dangerous today), because the Evil One gave it as the correct response.

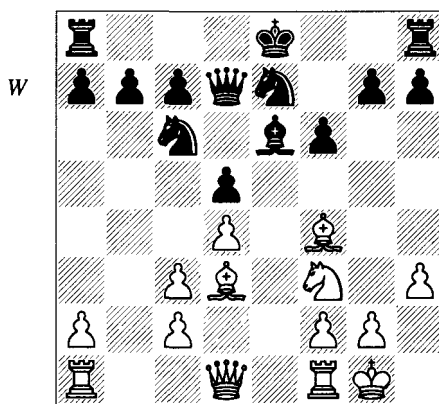
4 exd5 exd5 5 ♖f3 ♖e7

The modern, flexible move. Tarrasch's opponents had played ...♖f6 in such positions.

6 ♖d3 ♖bc6 7 h3 ♖e6!

An interesting choice. Nimzowitsch, the first great specialist in doubled pawn positions, anticipates the exchange on c3, after which ...♖f5 would only 'threaten' to re-straighten White's pawns by ...♖xd3. The move ...♖e6, on the

other hand, reinforces control over the critical c4-square.

8 0-0 ♗d7 9 ♖f4 ♖xc3 10 bxc3 f6! (D)

This restricts White's pieces (especially the knight on f3, which has nowhere to go) and prepares the simplest of kingside pawn advances by ...g5 and ...h5. Black's development is superior, although he has not yet castled, in the modern sense that his pieces coordinate with his pawns, whereas White's optically active minor pieces have no prospects without the freeing move c4.

11 ♗b1 g5 12 ♖g3 0-0-0 13 ♗e2 ♗de8 14 ♗fel ♖f5

Opting for simplification. 14...♖g6 would offer excellent attacking prospects, but Nimzowitsch is probably taking into account his opponent's love of complexity.

15 ♖xf5 ♖xf5 16 ♗b5 ♖d8 17 ♗c5 b6 18 ♗a3 ♖b7 19 ♗b3 ♖c6!

By forcing White to defend his c-pawn, Black has gained time to cover the queenside squares, and now threatens ...♖a5-c4 with decisive effect. Notice how he has never given White the opportunity to play the freeing c4. The actual occupation of the outpost square, shown in most instructional books, is secondary to this consideration.

20 ♖d2 ♖a5 21 ♗b2 ♗xe1+ 22 ♗xe1 ♗e8 23 ♗xe8 ♗xe8 24 ♗b1 ♖c8?!

Missing 24...♗e2!. But Black retains his large positional advantage.

25 ♗d1 ♗e6 26 ♖b3 ♖c4 27 ♖d2 ♖a3 28 ♖f1 ♖xc2 29 ♗h5 ♖d3

...and Black went on to win a lengthy opposite-coloured bishop ending.

Such games have influenced middlegame books up to this day. The standard examples of doubled pawns given in these books tend to be even more one-sided affairs where the owner of the doubled pawns is slowly constricted and overrun. But modern practice has evolved in a more balanced direction, as we shall see. First, a short detour:

An Old Dispute

One of the earliest points of contention in the theory of doubled pawns had to do with the Ruy Lopez Exchange Variation, 1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙b5 a6 4 ♙xc6 dxc6. This opening often leads to a queenless middlegame, pitting White's static advantage (his opponent's doubled pawns) against Black's dynamic ones (the two bishops and an open central file). The 'Exchange Ruy' still has a number of interesting features which make it relevant to modern chess. For one thing, White, possessing the knight-pair, faces a dilemma: whether or not to open the game. This question, which is absolutely critical in modern minor-piece play, will be looked at in great detail in Part 2. But also of interest is the eternal argument about whether two bishops in and of themselves constitute an advantage; this too is discussed at length in Part 2. Let's jump into these issues by looking at one of the most famous games in chess history:

Lasker – Capablanca

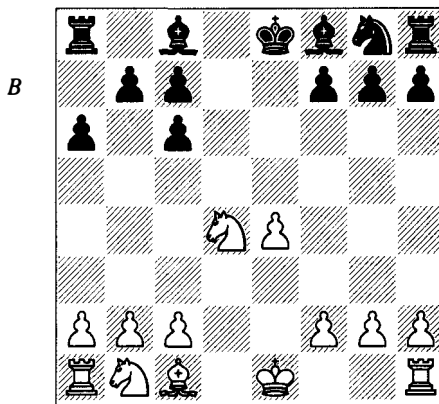
St Petersburg 1914

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙b5 a6 4 ♙xc6 dxc6 5 d4

Well, that's one question out of the way: Lasker, with the knight-pair, wants to open the position without delay!

5...exd4 6 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 7 ♘xd4 (D)

Capablanca comments: "For many years, the great Lasker considered that this position was theoretically won for White because of White's preponderance of pawns on the kingside. It is true that if all the pieces were to be exchanged ... White would win ... His famous predecessor, Steinitz, on the other hand, never had any faith in the efficacy of this system. He maintained that with the two bishops and free game Black had more than enough compensation ... I am inclined to agree with Steinitz." (*Last Lectures*).



7...♙d6

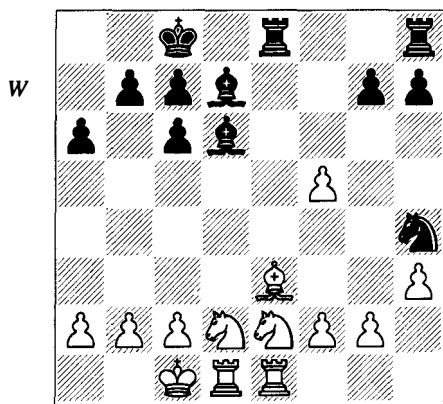
"Black's idea is to castle kingside. His reason is that the king ought to remain on the weaker side to oppose later the advance of White's pawns ... whether in practice that would be the best system would be rather difficult to prove." (*Chess Fundamentals*).

Behind all this is the opposition of static and dynamic strategy. The modern view is that normally, it's better to acquire these 'permanent' weaknesses early on, so that one has all the more opportunity to transform them via dynamic play into something favourable. In other words: the later one acquires a weakness, the less probable it is that one can repair or work around it. Black later found ways to enhance his bishop-pair in this position by castling *queen-side* (Capa to the contrary notwithstanding), and then opening lines. An excellent example of this was Petterson-Alekhine, Örebro 1935: 7...♙d6 8 ♙e3 0-0-0 9 ♘d2 ♘e7 (or 9...c5 10 ♘e2 b6 11 0-0-0 ♘e7 12 ♗he1 ♘c6 13 h3 ♙e7 14 ♘f4 ♗de8 15 ♘d5 ♙d8 = Ljubojević-Beliavsky, Tilburg 1986) 10 0-0-0 ♗e8 11 ♗he1 ♘g6 12 ♘e2?! ♙d6 13 h3 f5! 14 exf5 ♘h4! (see diagram on following page).

15 ♘c4 (White has trouble defending along the e-file, as shown by 15 g4 ♘g2 or 15 ♗g1 ♘xf5) 15...♘xg2 16 ♗g1 ♘xe3 17 ♘xe3 ♙e5, and Black's two bishops were an unopposed force: 18 ♘d4 ♗e7 19 c3 ♗f8 20 ♗g4 g6 21 ♘f3 ♙d6 22 ♘d4 c5 23 ♘dc2 ♙xf5 24 ♘xf5 ♗xf5 25 ♗g2 ♗e2 26 ♗f1 ♗d5 27 ♘e3 ♙f4 0-1.

8 ♘c3 ♘e7 9 0-0 0-0 10 f4

"This move I considered weak at the time", Capa continues, "and I do still. It leaves the e-pawn weak..."



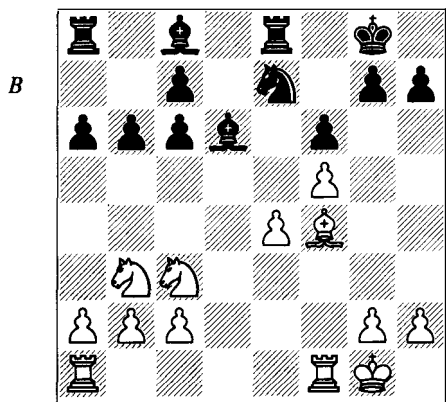
10...♖e8 11 ♖b3 f6 12 f5

A thrust which was widely praised and almost always given a '!'. It both controls e6 and frees White's c1-bishop. On the other hand, the move has certain drawbacks, as we shall see.

12...b6!

Pachman, Suetin (and others) have criticized this logical move. Réti gave 12...g5, to which Suetin adds a '!', claiming that 13 fxg6 ♖xg6 14 ♖xf6 ♖e5 followed by ...♙xc3 favours Black. But the text-move is fine.

13 ♙f4 (D)



13...♙b7?

This, however, is questionable, since it abandons e6. Lasker gave 13...♙xf4 14 ♖xf4 c5 15 ♖d1 ♙b7 16 ♖f2 (16 ♖d7 ♖ac8 17 ♖f2 ♖c6 only helps Black) and now 16...♖ad8!? 17 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 18 ♖d2 ♖xd2 19 ♖xd2 with advantage, but Capablanca points out that after the simple 19...♖c6, Black is better, threatening ...♖d4 and ...♖b4. What's more, the conventional advantage of bishop versus knight with a

stable pawn structure shows up clearly after 16...♖ac8!, and there is no good way to stop Black playing ...♖c6 and ...♖e5-c4 or ...♖d4. In addition, White's e4-pawn will be weak. With modern eyes, all this seems almost self-evidently true; and yet for years, commentators have claimed that White had a large or even winning advantage after 12 f5.

14 ♙xd6 cxd6 15 ♖d4 ♖ad8 16 ♖e6 ♖d7 17 ♖ad1 ♖c8?

Capablanca still claims equality after 17...c5 18 ♖f2 (18 ♖d5 ♙xd5 19 exd5 b5) 18...d5 19 exd5 ♙xd5 20 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 21 ♖xd5 ♖xd5.

After 17...♖c8?, Black did not play well, but Lasker achieved a dominant position and won nicely:

18 ♖f2 b5 19 ♖fd2 ♖de7 20 b4 ♙f7 21 a3 ♙a8 22 ♙f2 ♖a7 23 g4 h6 24 ♖d3 a5 25 h4 axb4 26 axb4 ♖ae7 27 ♙f3 ♖g8 28 ♙f4 g6 29 ♖g3 g5+ 30 ♙f3 ♖b6 31 hxg5 hxg5 32 ♖h3 ♖d7 33 ♙g3 ♙e8 34 ♖dh1 ♙b7 35 e5 dxe5 36 ♖e4 ♖d5 37 ♖6c5 ♙c8 38 ♖xd7 ♙xd7 39 ♖h7 ♖f8 40 ♖a1 ♖d8 41 ♖a8+ ♙c8 42 ♖c5 1-0

Although the knights won that one, the notes show how easily the bishops can become effective in such positions. This is particularly clear if White allows Black to consolidate in the opening, as in the following modern game:

Rozentalis – Timman

Erevan Olympiad 1996

1 e4 e5 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 ♙b5 a6 4 ♙xc6 dxc6 5 0-0 ♖d6 6 d3 f6 7 ♙e3 ♙e6 8 ♖bd2 ♖e7 9 d4

Again, the decision to open lines. This is almost certainly correct, or one will suffer from the bishops' pressure for the whole game.

9...exd4 10 ♖xd4 ♙f7 11 ♖e2!?

Black's next move is so effective that perhaps White should prevent it radically by 11 b4!?. Then he can consider a variety of aggressive piece placements.

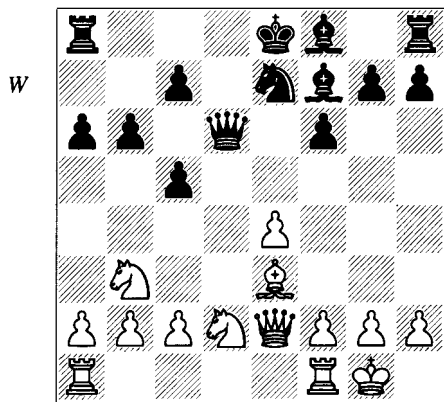
11...c5 12 ♖4b3 b6 (D)

This restricts the b3-knight – and White's activity – enough to allow Black to get developed.

13 a4 a5 14 ♖c4!?

It's hard to know what to do, since 14 f4 g6 doesn't seem to allow White any effective pawn-breaks to clear squares for his knights.

14...♖c6 15 ♖bd2 g6 16 ♙f4 ♙g7 17 ♖e3?



The great sin for the knights is passivity. Timman suggests 17 e5 0-0 18 ♖a1 with equality, although simply 18...♞d5 with the idea ...♖a8 still seems to favour the bishops.

17...0-0-0 18 ♖ad1 ♜he8 19 b3 g5 20 ♔g3 ♙g6 21 f4

Timman points out 21 f3 f5!, cracking open more lines. The bishops are too strong here, and Black's open central files are also helpful.

21...gxf4 22 ♙xf4 ♟b7 23 ♜f3 ♞d4!

This wins material and the game.

24 ♞ec4 f5 25 ♙e5 fxe4 26 ♜e2 ♙xe5 27 ♞xe5 ♜e6 28 ♞dc4 ♞d5 29 ♞de1 e3 30 g3 ♙e4

...and Black went on to win.

Although the Exchange Variation is still played periodically, it seems that the theoretical debate has been more or less settled, with the bishops achieving a comfortable equality. When White wins, interestingly, it is almost always by structure-changing pawn-breaks which, supported by tactics, create squares for the knights. Here's an example:

Fischer – Spassky

Match (game 9),

Sveti Stefan/Belgrade 1992

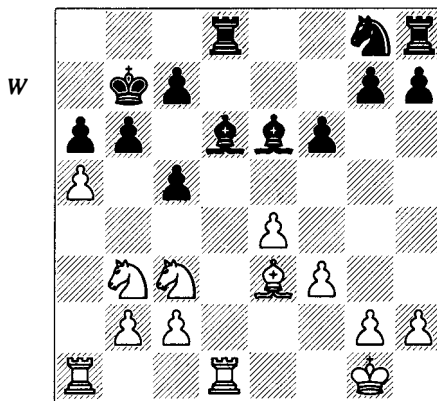
1 e4 e5 2 ♞f3 ♞c6 3 ♙b5 a6 4 ♙xc6 dxc6 5 0-0 f6 6 d4 exd4 7 ♞xd4 c5 8 ♞b3

Later in the match (game 27), Fischer deviated with 8 ♞e2 ♜xd1 9 ♞xd1, to which Spassky replied 9...♙d7 10 ♞c3 ♞e7 and even achieved an early advantage with the two bishops.

8...♜xd1 9 ♞xd1 ♙g4!?

In general, 9...♙g4 hasn't done particularly well, and 9...♙d7 10 ♞c3 ♞e7, as in the previous note, should be preferred.

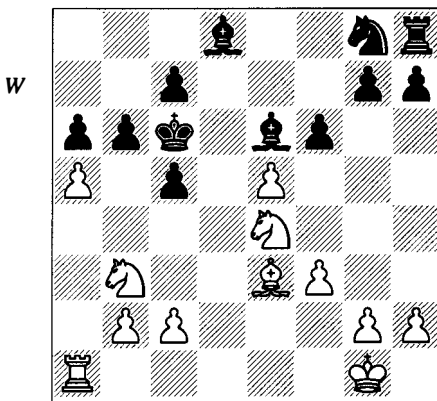
10 f3 ♙e6 11 ♞c3 ♙d6 12 ♙e3 b6 13 a4 0-0-0 14 a5! ♟b7 (D)



15 e5!

Quick development and open lines! As we will discover in Part 2, it tends to be a major mistake for the owner of the knight-pair to build up slowly, relying on the theory that one must keep lines closed to the bishops. The likelihood is rather that, once the possessor of the bishops achieves a stable pawn structure with equal development, it will be too late for the knights to be effective. Tactically, White's first point here is that 15...fxe5 fails to 16 axb6 cxb6 17 ♞e4 ♙e7 18 ♞xd8 ♙xd8 19 ♞bxc5+.

15...♙e7 16 ♞xd8 ♙xd8 17 ♞e4! ♟c6?? (D)



Spassky is taken aback by White's last move, which Fischer had run across in a pamphlet by

Soltis. But White was somewhat better in any case.

18 axb6 cxb6 19 ♖bxc5! ♙c8

No better is 19...bxc5 20 ♖xa6+ ♙b6 21 ♙xc5. The game is over.

20 ♖xa6 fxe5 21 ♖b4+ 1-0

Due to 21...♙b5 22 ♖d6+ ♙xb4 23 ♖a3! and mate by c3 next.

But this was an exceptional case of a badly-chosen variation by Black. As theory has evolved, the bishops have been shown to hold their own or better in this venerable line.

The Evolution of Doubled-Pawn Theory

Nimzowitsch's work set the standard for the modern view of doubled pawns, and we still see his ideas used in the opening named after him. In the next example, we investigate how those ideas have evolved.

Yusupov – Karpov

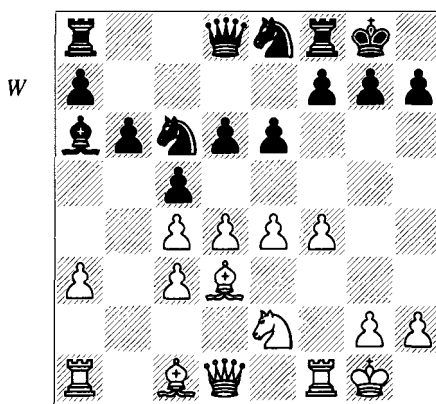
Linares 1993

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♖c3 ♙b4 4 e3 c5 5 ♙d3 ♖c6 6 a3 ♙xc3+ 7 bxc3 0-0 8 ♖e2 b6 9 e4 ♖e8!

I think that Nimzowitsch would like this refined modern move-order with 8...b6 (to pressure the c-pawn by ...♙a6) and 9...♖e8, which (a) avoids ♙g5, (b) anticipates White's idea of f4-f5 by preparing the blocking move ...f5, and (c) prepares ...♖d6 with further attack on that c4-pawn as well as support for f5.

We take such ideas for granted today, but they were learned by dint of lengthy experience. Compare the game Bronstein-Najdorf, Candidates tournament, Budapest 1950, which, after the same first 7 moves, went 8 ♖e2 d6!? (this slightly weakens the centre) 9 e4 ♖e8 10 0-0 b6 11 f4 ♙a6? (D) (the last chance for ...f5).

12 f5! e5 13 f6!. Now the black kingside is breached, because 13...♖xf6 14 ♙g5 puts too much pressure on the kingside, e.g. 14...exd4 15 ♖g3! (threatening ♖h5) 15...♙c7 16 ♖xf6! gxf6 17 ♙xf6 and it's all over. So Najdorf continued 13...♙h8 14 d5 ♖a5 15 ♖g3 gxf6 (this cedes the f5-square and the game – a traditional doubled-pawn theme, by the way – but what

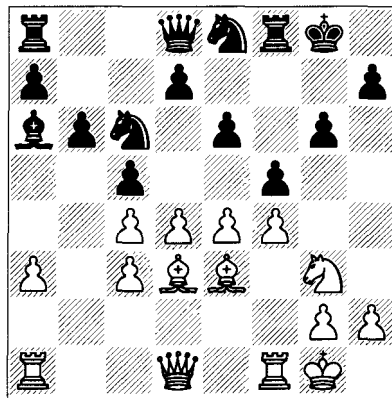


W

B

else was to be done versus 16 fxg7+ ♖xg7 17 ♙h6?) 16 ♖f5 ♙c8 17 ♙h5 ♙xf5 18 exf5 ♖g8 19 ♖f3 ♖g7 20 ♙h6 ♖g8 21 ♖h3 1-0. Black's problem was insufficient restraint of the king-side pawn-mass, but it took years to develop the exact methods by which this was possible. The prophylactic concept of ...♖e8/...f5/...♖d6, however, evolves naturally from the ideas of Nimzowitsch himself.

10 0-0 ♙a6 11 f4f5 12 ♖g3 g6 13 ♙e3 (D)



A very interesting position. At this point, most players (and especially players immersed in classic examples of how to restrain and then attack the doubled-pawn complex) would play a move such as 13...♖d6 (which has indeed been played here), 13...d6 or 13...♙e7 (preparing the standard attack via ...♖a5 and/or ...♖c8). Our chess education has impressed upon us how the bishops must not be freed, and how a stable, fixed structure favours the knights; after all, why else did we play the moves ...♖e8, ...f5, and ...g6?

But Karpov finds another solution, which is illustrative of the evolution of modern positional theory:

13...cxd4! 14 cxd4 d5!

Black not only undoubles White's pawns, but he plays a move which opens lines as well! With all due respect to Nimzowitsch, I don't believe that he (or any of his contemporaries, certainly) would have considered this idea. What is typically modern is Black's focus on colour-complexes; and again, in many doubled-pawn positions, the player fighting against the doubled pawns allows their liquidation in order to exploit the weak squares which they leave behind.

15 cxd5

The light squares also fall after 15 ♖a4 ♘a5! or 15 exf5 exf5 16 cxd5 ♙xd3 17 ♖xd3 ♖xd5, and ...♙d6 follows.

15...♙xd3 16 ♖xd3 fxe4 17 ♖xe4 ♖xd5! 18 ♖xd5 exd5 19 ♖ac1 ♖c8 20 f5!

This is obviously necessary soon, or Black will have a simple case of strong knights versus White's miserable bishop on e3. That would occur after ...♙d6 and ...♙e7, for example.

20...♙d6 21 fxg6

Instructive is 21 ♙h6 ♖f7 22 f6 ♙d7! with the idea of ...♙f7, as given by Karpov. White's bishop would be out, but the knights are still obviously better, and White's d-pawn would require attention as well.

21...hxg6 22 ♖xf8+ ♙xf8 23 h4!

White is responding ingeniously to Black's threat of a bind. This move involves the sacrifice of a pawn, but gives White much-needed counterplay, as we will see.

23...♙c4 24 ♙g5 ♙xd4 25 h5?

Karpov rightly suggests 25 ♖f1+! ♙e8 (but maybe 25...♙g8 is a better winning try) 26 ♖e1+ ♙d7 27 ♖e7+ ♙c6 28 ♙g7!. Even if Black gets two passed queenside pawns after 28...♙xa3, White's passed h-pawn will be a major force, good enough to equalize.

25...gxh5 26 ♖f1+ ♙e8 27 ♙xh5 ♙xa3 28 ♙g7+ ♙d7 29 ♖f7+ ♙c6 30 ♖xa7 ♙ac2!

After a forced sequence, Black's knights are poised to escort the b-pawn in. The rest is straightforward (at least, for Karpov):

31 ♙f6 b5 32 g4 b4 33 ♖a2 b3 34 ♖b2 ♙c5 35 ♙f5 ♖g8! 36 ♙xd4 ♖xg4+ 37 ♙f2 ♙xd4 38 ♙xd4+ ♙xd4 39 ♖xb3 ♖e4 40 ♖a3 ♖e8 0-1

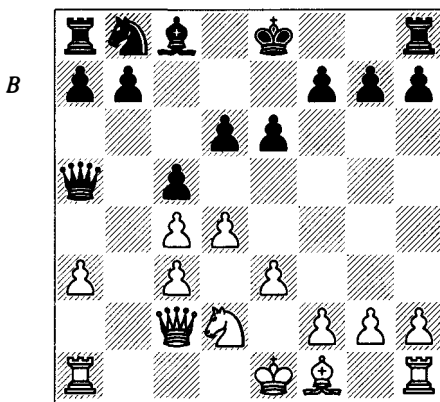
As he did with so many other positional issues, Botvinnik was one of the first players to re-evaluate doubled pawns, managing to find advantages in their possession. Here are two examples:

Botvinnik – Kan

USSR Ch, Leningrad 1939

1 d4 ♙f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♙c3 ♙b4 4 ♙f3 c5 5 a3 ♙xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♖a5 7 ♙d2 ♙e4 8 ♖c2 ♙xd2 9 ♙xd2 d6 10 e3 (D)

Botvinnik avoids 10 e4?, which would allow 10...cxd4! 11 cxd4 ♙c6 12 ♖d3 e5!, and Black will be left with a knight outpost, the better bishop, and great attacking chances.

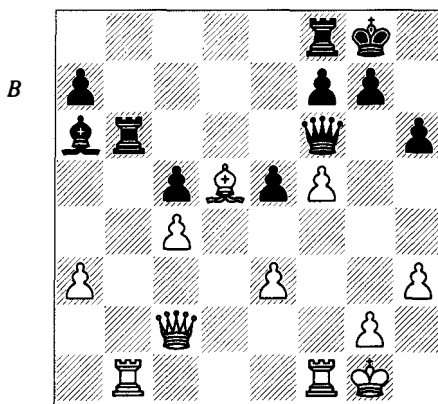
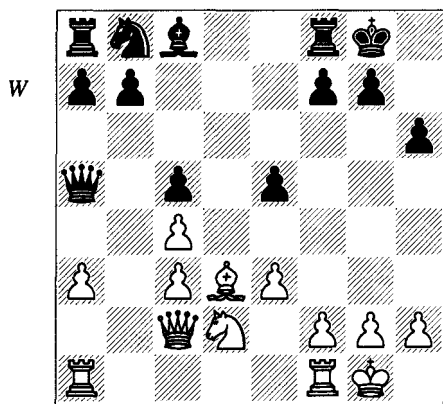


10...e5?!

Pachman is very critical of this move, and he is probably right. But consider its value in terms of classical theory. With one move, Black stakes out territory in the centre and frees his c8-bishop; with three central pawns on dark squares, this should be an excellent bishop indeed. On top of that, Black can envisage forcing White to resolve the central situation after, for instance, ...♙c6. Then if White plays d5 and e4, he takes on an awful light-squared bishop, but if he exchanges on e5 or c5, White's central mobility will disappear and his c-pawns will be not only doubled, but isolated. Something like this must have gone through Kan's mind, but...

11 dxe5! dxe5 12 ♙d3 h6 13 0-0 0-0 (D)

Remarkably, it is Black's pawn structure that is worse here! Why? Because White has the wonderful outpost square on d5 for both his knight and bishop, whereas the 'weak' doubled



pawns cover similar squares (especially d4) for Black's pieces. Such ideas have become typical in modern chess, but at the time, the notion of taking on such isolated doubled pawns (and without a compensating attack) was unknown.

14 f4!

In similar positions today, White uses another interesting plan, involving the transfer of a knight to d5, for example, by e4, $\text{f}d1$, and $\text{f}1-e3-d5$. Properly prepared, that would be quite reasonable in this position, but 14 f4! is more direct. After 14...exf4 15 exf4 f5 (to prevent f5), White gets the open e-file and an outpost on e5, so Black defends instead:

14...d7 15 f5 d7

Pachman prefers 15...f6 16 e4, but this looks very nice for White, who can play e4, e4, and even consider the attack by g4, h4, and g5.

16 e4 d8 17 f6+ xf6 18 e4 b8 19 ad1 b6 20 h3 a6

Black can't move his queen because White will play f6, and Botvinnik has ultimate control of the d-file because of his outpost on d5, e.g., 20...b7 21 e7 (21 e5!?) 21...xb7 22 We4! e7 23 d5 and 24 fdl. Rather than wait for White to pile up on the d-file, Black plays for open lines on the queenside.

21 e5 b5 22 cxb5 xb5 23 c4 b6 24 b1! (D)

24...d8

White's last move prevented 24...b7 and also discouraged 24...fb8, when Pachman gives 25 xb6 xb6 (25...xb6 26 f6!) 26 Wa4!? (or 26 b1!) 26...e7 27 f6! gxf6 28 c2 g7 29 f3 "and White has a strong attack". But what follows is just a matter of

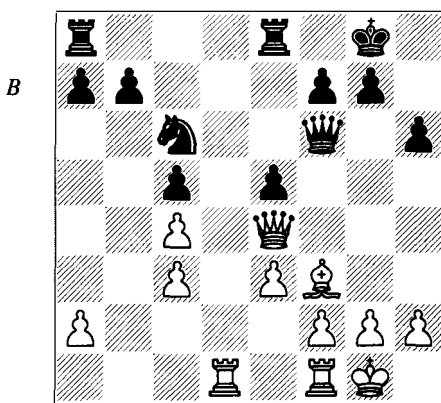
technique; White, with the active pieces, simply hunts down the black weaknesses:

25 xb6 axb6 26 e4 c8 27 Wa4 d7 28 Wa7 e8 29 b1 d6 30 a4! c7 31 a5 bxa5 32 Wa5 a6 33 Wxc5 a2 34 We3 Wa6 35 b8 Wa4 36 c7 a3 37 Wc5 a2 38 a8 Wa8 39 e4 a8 40 xe5 c6 41 Wc7 1-0

Botvinnik – Chekhover

Leningrad 1938

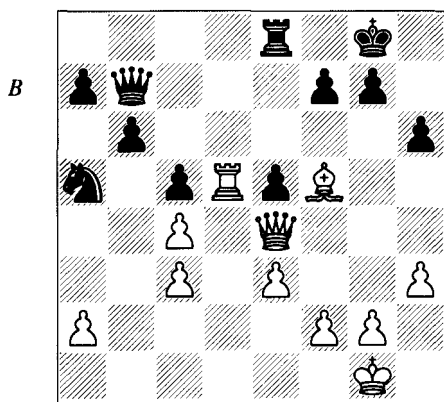
1 d4 f6 2 c4 e6 3 c3 b4 4 f3 0-0 5 g5 d6 6 e3 e7 7 e2 e5 8 c2 e8 9 0-0 e3 10 bxc3 h6 11 h4 c5 12 ael g4 13 xf6! Wxf6 14 We4 xf3 15 xf3 c6 16 dxc5! dxc5 17 d1 (D)



Here we go again! At first sight, Black has the superior pawn structure (due to White's a- and c-pawns); but in reality, those pawns secure an outpost on d5 (eventually to be occupied by his bishop) and deny any outpost to Black's

knight. In Part 2, we will talk about the lack of dogmatism which characterizes modern chess. In these two games, Botvinnik demonstrates the concrete, pragmatic attitude which took over from the principle-based play of his predecessors. He correctly assesses that his superior piece play will force a favourable transformation of the game (either by change of structure or win of material) *before* the long-term, static difficulties with his pawns ever come into effect.

17...♖ad8 18 ♖d5 b6 19 ♖fd1 ♜a5 20 h3
 ♜xd5 21 ♜xd5 ♜e7 22 ♜g4! ♜b7 23 ♜f5! (D)



Again threatening ♖d7 (which Black prevented with his last move), e.g., 23...♜a8 24 ♖d7 ♜xe4 25 ♜xe4 with ♜d5 next. Black manages to take the queens off without losing material, but only by granting White's pieces maximum activity:

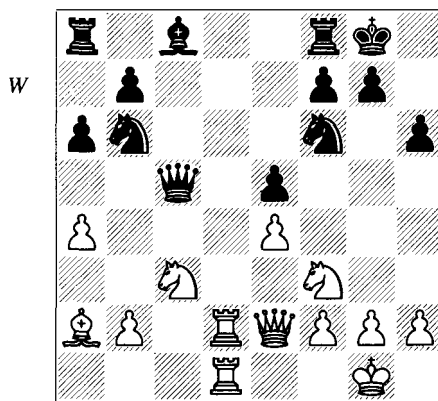
23...♜b8 24 ♖d7 ♖d8 25 ♜xe5 ♜xc4 26 ♜xb8 ♜xb8 27 ♜e4! ♜a3 28 ♜d5 ♖f8 29 e4

It's all over. The advance of White's king-side pawns and centralization of his king decide easily:

29...a5 30 c4 b5 31 cxb5 ♜xb5 32 e5 a4 33 f4 ♜d4 34 ♜f2 g5 35 g3 gxf4 36 gxf4 ♜e6 37 ♜e3 c4 38 f5 ♜c5 39 ♜c7 ♜d3 40 e6 fxe6 41 fxe6 1-0

I want to emphasize this modern pragmatic attitude towards what have traditionally been considered weaknesses. Today, players allow doubled pawns in all kinds of positions, merely because they know that the weaknesses can't be exploited, or because those pawns are useful in covering squares or even helpful in attack. Let's

look at one more example from Botvinnik's play:



Botvinnik – N. Sorokin
USSR Ch, Moscow 1931

Black's position is without serious weaknesses, so if White is to achieve anything, he should do so quickly. Ironically, if it were Black to move, he might consider playing the creative 20...♜e6!, allowing doubled pawns himself, since after 21 ♜xe6 fxe6, he covers d5, opens the f-file, and contests the light squares. But it is White's move, and Jeremy Silman perceptively points out that both the aggressive a5 as well as White's threats to the e5-pawn "are thwarted by Black's queen, which is doing a superlative defensive job." Thus:

20 ♜e3!

To quote Silman: "How many players would refuse to even look at this move because of the doubled, isolated pawns?" At the time of Botvinnik, my guess would be that top players might well have overlooked this idea. But interestingly, we see such practical moves regularly from today's leading players, who are not much interested in theoretical considerations when they can smell a dynamic kill.

20...♜xe3 21 fxe3 ♜g4 22 a5 ♜c8 23 ♜c1!

Eyeing c7 and threatening e5; so Black must cede his good bishop.

23...♜xf3 24 gxf3 ♜e7 25 ♜d5 ♜c6

Perhaps 25...♜exd5 26 exd5 ♜ac8 was a better try, even if White's bishop and passed pawn combination will ultimately beat the knight.

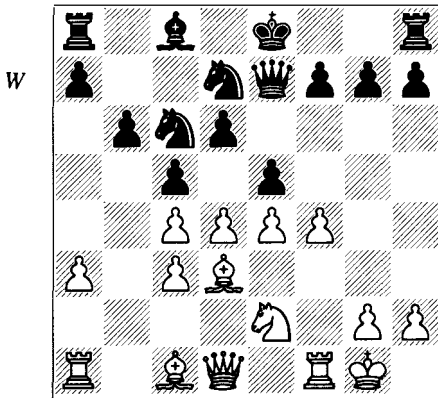
26 ♜xf6+ gxf6 27 ♖d7 ♖ab8 28 ♜f2 ♜xa5

29 ♖cc7 ♗bc8 30 ♖xf7 ♖xc7 31 ♖xc7+ ♖h8
32 ♔d5 b5

The end. Black's knight is paralysed on a5, and White just toys with his opponent before cashing in:

33 b3 ♖d8 34 ♖g3 f5 35 ♖h4 fxe4 36 fxe4
♖d6 37 ♖h5 ♖f6 38 h3 ♖d6 39 h4 ♖b6 40 ♖g4
♖f6 41 ♖a7 ♖b6 42 ♖e7 ♖d6 43 ♖c7 ♖f6 44
♖a7 ♖b6 45 ♖c7 ♖f6 46 ♖h5 ♖d6 47 ♔f7 ♖f6
48 ♔g6 ♖xb3 49 ♖xh6 ♖f8 50 ♖h7+ ♖g8 51
♖g7+ ♖h8 52 ♔f7 ♖xf7 53 ♖xf7 ♖g8 54 ♖g6
♖d2 55 ♖d7 1-0

Sometimes the advantages gained by taking on the doubled pawns are only sufficient to create an unbalanced game. Here's an irresistibly entertaining example:



Lilienthal – Smyslov
Pärnu 1947

This position looks quite solid for Black. One would think that White might play ♔e3 and try to swing the queen to the kingside, or find a way to force concessions by playing a well-timed ♖g3. But Lilienthal finds an astonishing way to continue:

12 ♖xe5 dxe5 13 dxe5!?? ♖dxe5

Hang on here! White has four pawn islands and four isolated pawns, including the doubled pawns and a serious weakness on e4. On top of that, Black, with nary a weakness, is already occupying the ideal square e5 with his knight! How can White possibly justify his play?

14 ♖f4

First, he believes that the d5 outpost is worth quite a bit. But beyond that, White's c-pawns

cover the d-file, so that a black knight can't come to d4. And in some cases, the f-file may come in handy. This is all a bit hard to believe, but just the fact that someone of Lilienthal's stature would play this way, and that it's not clear who is in fact better, shows how complex the subject of doubled pawns can be.

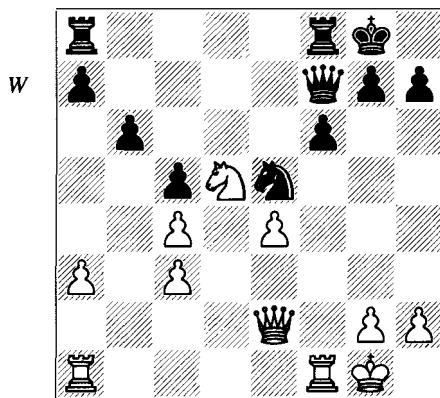
14...♔g4!?

Whereas White has been undogmatic in the extreme, maybe Black needed to be a little bit more stereotyped, and not exchange White's only bad minor piece. In my opinion, something like 14...0-0 15 ♖d5 ♖d6 seems called for, e.g., 16 ♔f4 ♔a6 17 ♖a4 ♖a5 18 ♖ad1 ♖ae8 19 ♔e2 ♔b7 with a promising, if unclear, position.

15 ♔e2 ♔xe2 16 ♖xe2 f6 17 ♖d5 ♖f7

Mayer mentions 17...♖b7, when 18 ♖h5+ ♖g6 19 g4!? 0-0 20 g5 is an interesting follow-up.

18 ♔f4 0-0 19 ♔xe5 ♖xe5 (D)



20 a4!

Now Lilienthal has an amazing idea on the queenside! He wants to play a5, even though it appears that Black will easily prevent that. Of course, with hindsight, one could argue that this is probably forced, since otherwise ...♖b7-a6 could soon follow.

20...♖c6 21 ♖g4 ♖h8 22 a5! ♖xa5 23 e5 f5
24 ♖e2

White's entire conception is unbelievably ingenious. Now he has a passed pawn with a powerful lust to expand! This seems to offer enough compensation for the pawn, probably even more than enough.

24...♖ae8 25 ♖ae1 ♖e6

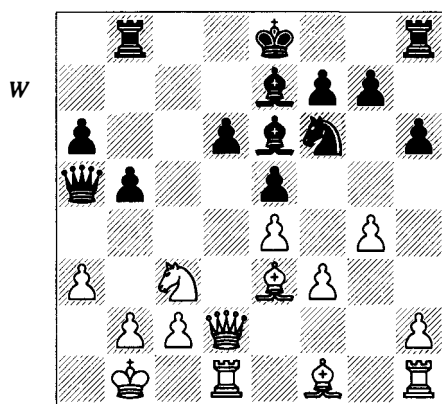
At first, 25...♖c6 26 e6 ♗g6 looks good, but 27 e7 ♜f7 28 ♗e6! intending ♗d7 favours White! So Smyslov tries to blockade by sacrificing an exchange, but White again uses the d5 outpost to break through:

26 ♖f4 ♜fe8!? 27 ♖xe6 ♗xe6 28 ♗d3 g6 29 ♜f4 ♖c6 30 ♗d5! ♖xe5 31 ♖f1!

Now there's nothing to be done about ♜f2-e2, and White wins:

31...♖g7 32 ♜f2 ♖f6 33 ♜fe2 h5 34 ♜xe5 ♗xe5 35 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 36 ♗d6+ ♜e6 37 ♗f8+ ♖e5 38 ♗b8+ ♖f6 39 ♗xa7 ♖g5 40 ♗d7 ♜e4 41 ♗d8+ ♖h6 42 h4 ♖g7 43 ♗c7+ ♖h6 44 ♗xb6 1-0

To conclude this section, let's look at a brilliant recent example, which illustrates the open-mindedness of contemporary players towards this subject:



Ivanchuk – Anand

Match (game 1), Linares 1992

This is a typical Sicilian position. White now embarks upon a standard simplifying procedure:

16 ♖d5 ♗xd2 17 ♖xf6+? ♗xf6!!

But he had not taken this fine reply into account. Normal would be 17...♖xf6 18 ♜xd2 ♖e7 19 h4, with White “perhaps a little better” (Anand).

18 ♜xd2 h5!

Anand comments: “At first glance White is better, or at least not worse, in view of Black's damaged pawn structure. However, White is actually seriously worse. If White could consolidate his kingside pawn structure by h3 then

he would indeed be better, but just at the moment this is impossible.”

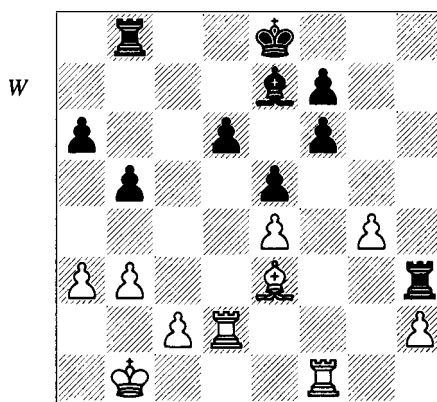
19 ♜g1

Anand gives 19 ♖e2 hxg4 20 fxg4 ♜h3 with Black better.

19...hxg4 20 fxg4 ♖c4!!

A paradoxical move in the modern spirit. This stops h3, but at the seemingly devastating cost of trading Black's very good bishop for White's very bad one. Just look at those weaknesses on d5 and f5! Anand comments: “Black's ‘bad’ e7-bishop will protect his pawns while he forces pawn exchanges eventually leading to connected central passed pawns.” In Part 2, we will hear from Suba about his claim that ‘bad bishops protect good pawns!’; this is a sterling example.

21 b3 ♖xf1 22 ♜xf1 ♜h3 (D)



“Black appears to have committed a whole list of positional sins: allowing doubled f-pawns, giving White an outside passed h-pawn and exchanging his ‘good’ bishop with ...♖c4; yet he is better. Paradoxical? Yes, but this doesn't mean that the old positional rules have been suspended for the course of this game.” (Anand). He goes on to explain that his rook on h3 disrupts the white position and that Black has the long-term plan of exchanging his d-pawn for White's e-pawn by ...d5, and his f-pawn for the g-pawn by ...f5, to give him connected central passed pawns.

Well, I guess there are two ways of looking at this, but I think most people would say that such rules have not only been ‘suspended’ for this game, but have also shown to be unreliable guidelines! The whole point of rules is that they

allow the player to use them in the place of extremely lengthy calculations to confidently enter certain types of positions, as Ivanchuk has done here. Of course, if by achieving the better bishop and classically superior pawn structure (holes on d5 and f5), White had allowed a mating attack, one could argue that, after all, you can't expect too much from rules. But when, in a simplified position with Black's e7-bishop contributing no activity, the mere presence of one active rook can throw such a position entirely in Black's favour, I think we can rightly question whether such rules are serving their purpose. Put this another way: how many other players in the world would have played 17...gxf6, at the same time foreseeing 20...♙c4 (or come to think of it, even played 20...♙c4 given the enormous advantage of being given that position to think about)? My guess is: very, very few (after all, Anand himself gives '!!' to both moves). But why? Because we would automatically reject this combination of ideas *on principle*. We put our faith in these rules, and dogmatically assume that the good bishop and far better pawn structure will favour White. It is one of the insights of modern players, and especially of the best ones, that one has to play the position itself, not some abstract idea of the position. In fact, as we shall see, the development of that simple notion characterizes most of the progress which chess has made in the modern era.

To return to the game, what follows is complicated and messy, but the essence of it is that Anand's insight about the passed pawns (which only come into being 12 moves after his original decision!) proves to be true.

23 ♖e2?!

Better was 23 ♙g1, after which Anand gives a lengthy analysis based on the line 23...♙d7 24 ♛d3 ♛h4!, with Black better in every variation.

23...♙d7 24 g5

Anand passes over this seemingly cooperative move (it helps Black achieve his passed pawns) without comment. But by ...♙g8, it could have been forced in any case.

24...♙e6 25 gxf6 ♙xf6 26 ♙d2 ♙e7! 27 ♙e1 f6 28 ♙g3

This reorganization took just a bit too long, since now Black gets ...d5 in.

28...d5 29 exd5+ ♙xd5 30 ♛f5! ♙c6! 31 ♛ef2?

Anand points out that White's last real chance was 31 ♛f3!, forcing 31...♛h7 32 ♛c3+ ♙b7, when he says that Black has 'a hard technical task ahead'. The rest of the game has to do with getting ready to push the passed pawns:

31...♛h6 32 ♙b2 ♙d7 33 ♛e2 ♙d6 34 ♛f3 ♛c8! 35 ♙e1 ♙e6 36 ♛d3 ♛h7 37 ♛g3 ♙c5 38 ♙a2 ♛d7 39 ♛c3 ♛cc7 40 h4 ♛d1 41 ♙f2 ♙d6 42 ♛g3 e4!

"After all the fuss about Black's connected passed pawns, he gives one of them up! However, it does win the exchange." (Anand).

43 ♛xe4+ ♙e5 44 ♛xe5+ fxe5 45 ♙b2 ♛d2 0-1

Quite a game! We will see other examples of unusual and creative doubled-pawn positions in Part 2; but before closing this chapter, let's turn briefly to a closely-related subject:

Tripling Up

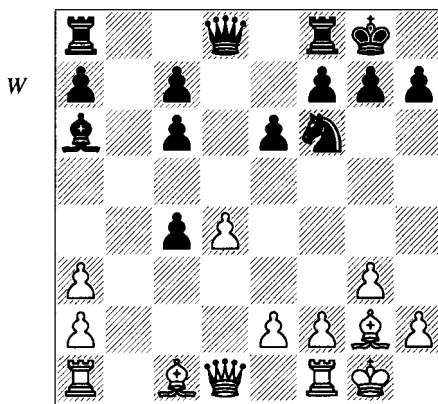
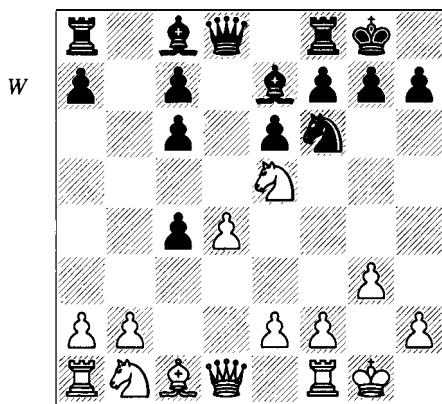
In many modern openings, doubled pawns are pitted against dynamic piece play. But in a few, those doubled pawns arise from what are initially *tripled* pawns. That anyone would be so optically challenged as to cheerfully allow his pawns to be tripled may strike us as unusual, but in the two cases we will look at, just to make it worse, those pawns are on an open enemy file as well! Let's briefly examine these case studies of the modern emphasis on activity and opportunism.

In the Catalan Opening, one of the main (and quintessentially modern) variations goes:

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 g3 ♙e7 5 ♙g2 0-0 6 0-0 dxc4 7 ♘e5 ♘c6!? 8 ♘xc6

Robatsch invented 7...♘c6!? in the 1970s, and it was quickly noticed by unstereotyped players such as Petrosian and Geller. Black is willing to accept doubled – and even tripled – pawns to fight back against White's centre and achieve active piece play. Consider 8 ♙xc6 bxc6 (D).

White can allow Black to keep his tripled pawns for a move more by 9 ♘c3!?, but then their use as a battering ram is illustrated after 9...c5! 10 dxc5 ♙xc5 11 ♛a4 ♘d5! 12 ♘e4 ♘b6 13 ♛c2 ♛d5, and White still has to justify his pawn minus.



So more typical is 9 Qxc6 We8 10 Qxe7+ Wxe7 11 Wa4 , leading to a characteristic position in which Black counts upon his activity, the opposite-coloured bishops, and White's slight kingside weaknesses to make up for his pawn minus (and the isolated a- and c-pawns), e.g., 11...a5!? (11...e5 is also unclear) 12 Wxc4 Qa6 13 Wc2 Qfd8 14 Qd1 c5! 15 dxc5 Qxd1+ 16 Wxd1 Wxc5 with plenty of activity, Stohl-Polak, Czechoslovakia 1990.

8...bxc6 9 $\text{Qa3!?$

Now White takes on a pair of doubled pawns! It is very typical of the evolution of doubled-pawn theory that, increasingly, we see positions where activity is emphasized over even serious permanent pawn weaknesses. Here White gains a very active bishop-pair in return for the weak a-pawns (and more importantly, in return for allowing Black another tempo to improve his own position).

The obvious 9 Qxc6 Qb8 10 Qc3 Qb7! 11 Qxb7 Qxb7 yields a very instructive position in which the other advantage of the tripled pawns, pressure along the b- and d-files, comes into play, for example, 12 e3 c5 13 Wf3 Qd7! 14 dxc5 Wc7 15 c6 Qd6 and Black has no problems.

9...Qxa3 10 bxa3 Qa6! (D)

This position merits some discussion. Despite the doubled a-pawns, White's structure is certainly healthier, and he has two bishops and an extra centre pawn. These are classical advantages which would probably have frightened off players from Black's position even during Botvinnik's reign (when the bishops held sway), as well as in pre-modern times. In fact, 7... Qc6 leads to a number of such positions,

entirely dependent upon dynamic imbalances and open lines, which accounts for its not being taken seriously until the last few decades. In the diagrammed position, specifically, we see Black achieving a lead in development as White recovers his material. The tripled pawns yield Black play on the b- and d-files, which is critical, and he gets time to set up a blockade-style position which justifies his possession of the knight. We shall now follow the course of an interesting and thematic game:

Vladimirov – Vaganian

Moscow 1990

11 Qxc6

Karpov demonstrated Black's active strategy against Antunes in Tilburg 1994 after 11 Qg5 h6 12 Qxf6 Wxf6 13 Qxc6 Qab8 14 Wa4 Qb6 15 Qfd1 Qd8 16 Qf3! c6! 17 Qg2 We7 18 e3 Qc8! 19 h4 Qb5 20 Qb4 c5 21 dxc5 Qxc5 22 Qd8+ Qh7 23 Qad1 Qc6! with a large advantage to Black.

11... Qb8 12 Wa4 Qb6 13 Qg2 Qd5 14 Wc2?!

Vaganian suggests 14 $\text{Wa5!?$, which he considers equal.

14...f5!

Kotronias rightly praises this move, which prevents White from kicking the knight away from its powerful post on d5.

15 e4 fxe4 16 Qxe4 h6 17 $\text{Qg2?!$

Better was 17 $\text{Qe3!?$ Wf6 18 Qfb1 Qfb8 , but this still fails to solve the problem of White's bad bishop on e3 and Black's more active pieces.

17... Wf6 18 Qe3 c3! 19 Qfb1 Qc4!

This threatens to double rooks, so White is forced to straighten out Black's pawns, and the c3-pawn also gains in strength.

20 ♖xb6 cxb6 21 ♖e1 b5!

Now ...a5 and ...b4 is threatened. White's next move prepares ♖f2 and ♖h3, but Black uses the new opportunity to enter a position with much superior activity.

22 f4 ♖xe3 23 ♖xe3 ♗xd4 24 ♗xc3 ♖d8 25 ♖f3 a5! 26 ♗xd4 ♖xd4 27 ♖e2 ♖f7 28 ♖xc4 bxc4 29 ♖c3 e5! 30 fxe5 ♖e6

Black is clearly winning. The real moral here is that there's a long stretch between the early middlegame and the endgame. In this game, by the time that stage was reached, Black had straightened his queenside pawns and ironically, it was White's doubled a-pawns that allowed Black's passed c3-pawn to become a major force.

Another opening in which tripled pawns routinely arise is the French Defence Winawer Variation (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♖c3 ♖b4), in which White ends up with the triplets after, for example, 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♖xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♖e7 with White playing dxc5 shortly thereafter. There are a number of such lines, but they all depend upon the same ideas as we saw in the Catalan: use of the b- and d-files, an outpost on d4, a lead in development and activity while Black is recovering his pawns, and even a central lever with c4, analogous to Black's ...c5 in the above examples. Let's see how this idea works:

Smyslov – Uhlmann

Mar del Plata 1966

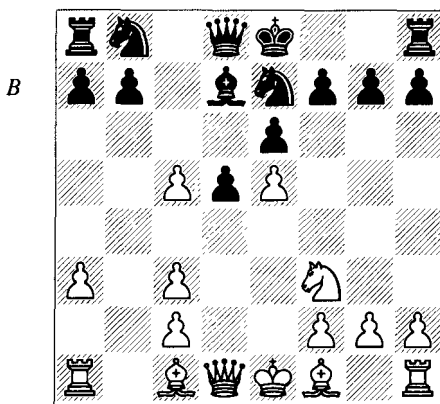
1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♖c3 ♖b4 4 e5 ♖e7

Smyslov first played with the tripled pawns against Botvinnik in the 20th match game of their 1957 world championship, which went 4...c5 5 a3 ♖xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♗c7 7 ♗g4 f6 8 ♖f3 ♖c6 9 ♗g3 ♗f7?! 10 dxc5! ♖ge7 11 ♖d3 fxe5 12 ♖xe5 with a solid advantage for White.

5 a3 ♖xc3+ 6 bxc3 c5 7 ♖f3 ♖d7 8 a4

Another hotly-disputed tripled-pawn line arises after 8 dxc5 (D), again with the idea of grabbing the initiative with moves like ♖b1, ♖d4-b5, and/or ♖b4-g4 in some cases.

As in our main line (after 8 a4), this set of tripled pawns comes with features not existing in



the Catalan Opening examples above. The white e5-pawn, for one, can be a cramping factor, but it also temporarily lacks support. Another difference is that Black already has one more piece out than White, so pure speed of development is not an advantage as it was for the holder of the tripled pawns in the Catalan. To make up for this White has ideas of ♖d4-b5 and ♖b1-b4, which in conjunction with the e5-pawn can put great pressure on Black's position.

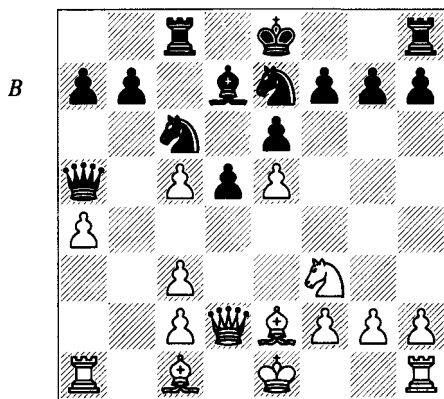
One of the original games with 8 dxc5, Spassky-Korchnoi, Candidates match (game 10), Belgrade 1977, went 8...♗c7 9 ♖d3 ♖a4!? 10 ♖b1! (in their 8th match game, 10 0-0 ♖d7 11 ♖d4!? ♖xc5! 12 ♖b5+ ♖xb5 13 ♖xb5 ♗xe5 14 ♖e1 ♖e4! 15 f3 a6! handed the initiative to Black; 10 ♖b1! drives Black's pieces back as quickly as possible) 10...♖d7 11 ♖b4 ♖c6 12 0-0 ♖xc5 13 ♖g4! ♖g6 14 ♖d4 0-0-0 15 f4 ♖d7 16 ♖g3 ♖b8 17 ♖e1 ♖a8 18 h4! ♖xd3 19 cxd3 h5 20 ♖e3 ♖de8 21 a4! with a serious initiative and pressure on both sides of the board (although White later played poorly and lost).

It's extremely interesting that one solution to this approach came in the form of a radical pawn sacrifice for activity and initiative, in the modern spirit. From the diagram (after 8 dxc5), Renman came up with 8...♖a4 9 ♖b1 ♖d7! 10 ♖xb7 ♖xc5, simply giving up a pawn to counterattack along the c-file and retake the initiative from White, for example, 11 ♖b4 ♖a5 12 ♖d4 0-0 13 ♗g4!? ♗c7! 14 f4 a5 15 ♖xa4!? (since 15 ♖b2 ♖e4 is clearly favourable for Black) 15...♖xa4 16 ♖b5 ♗c5 17 ♗h3 ♖ab8 18 ♖e3 ♗c6 19 ♖d3 g6 20 ♖d4 ♗xc3+ 21 ♖f2 ♖c5 22 ♖d1 ♖b2! and Black was winning in

Messa-Renman, Reggio Emilia 1980/1. This line has held up well; in it, as so often in modern chess, initiative and activity tend to outweigh either material or weaknesses.

8...♖a5 9 ♜d2 ♜bc6 10 ♙e2 ♜c8 11 dxc5!?

(D)



Thus the tripled pawns arise, and on an already-occupied open file (10...♜c8) to boot! What's more, the e5-pawn is irrevocably weakened and will almost certainly fall. It is a tribute to both Smyslov's imagination and modern pragmatism that such a line was discovered after years of Winawer practice. White's point is that rather than defend his centre, he will use d4 as a pivot post for his knight and open as many lines as possible for his bishops. Up to this move, Black was ready for ...cxd4 and simplification, but now he has to reorganize.

Having said that, Black has some advantages here which White lacked in our Catalan examples:

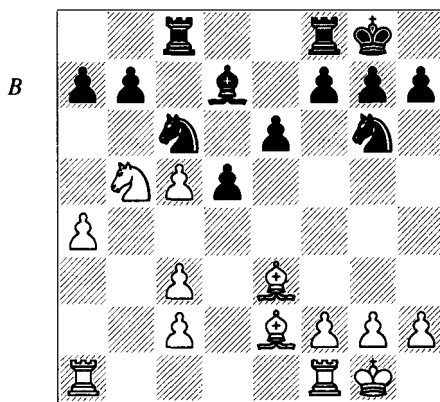
- a) he has plenty of active pieces developed;
- b) he has a strong grip on the light squares, so that the move c4 by White tends to activate Black's pieces at least as much as White.

These dynamic features lead to a complex and balanced struggle.

11...♜g6 12 0-0 0-0

Later, it was discovered that Black could safely capture the e-pawn by 12...♜xe5 here, also with dynamically balanced play.

13 ♜e3! ♜c7 14 ♜d4! ♜xe5! 15 ♜b5 ♜xe3 16 ♙xe3 (D)



16...a6?!

Further practice showed that 16...♜b8! was better, for example, 17 a5 (versus ...a6 and ...♜a5-c4) 17...a6 18 ♜d6 ♜ce7! 19 ♜ab1 ♙c6 intending ...♜c8, which was equal or even slightly better for Black in Pope-Davis, Australia 1975. Once again, the fundamental structural solidity of Black's position keeps him in the game. But the text is perhaps more instructive; after it, White uses his two bishops and chips away at Black's optically good centre until he is left with a clear advantage which he converts in the endgame. It is also particularly interesting that Smyslov refrains from the obvious c4 break and is in no hurry to liquidate his tripled pawns:

17 ♜d6 ♜c7 18 a5 e5 19 ♜fb1 ♜d8 20 ♜d1 ♙c6 21 ♙g4! ♜e6 22 ♜ab1 ♜e7 23 g3 f5 24 ♙h3 g6?! 25 f4! d4 26 cxd4 ♜d5 27 ♙f2 exd4 28 ♙xd4 ♜xd4 29 ♜xd4 ♜e7 30 ♙f2 ♜c3 31 ♜e1 ♜xe1 32 ♙xe1 ♜e4 33 ♜xe4 ♙xe4 34 c3 ♜f6 35 ♜d8+ ♙g7 36 ♜d7+ ♜f7 37 ♜xf7+ ♙xf7 38 ♙d2 ♙e6 39 c4 ♙d7 40 ♙e3 ♙c6 41 ♙d4 ♙d7 42 ♙e5

...and White won rather easily.

With these examples, we conclude our look at the history and evolution of doubled-pawn theory. Needless to say, doubled pawns are still a disadvantage to their possessor in a majority of cases. But today, we have come far from the dogma which used to dominate theory, and the decision to take on doubled pawns has become a pragmatic one, based upon potentially compensating factors.

5 The Evolution of the IQP

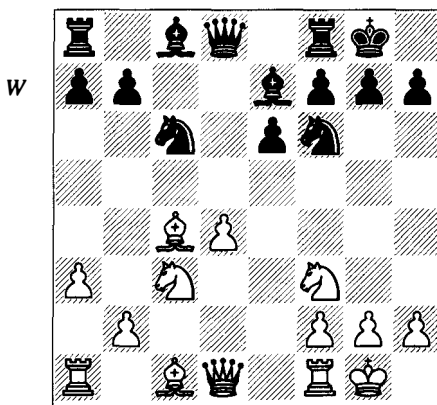
This chapter deals with the strengths and weaknesses of the isolated queen's pawn ('IQP') and associated structures. This is an issue which has retained its topicality throughout the years; and there are still plenty of players who favour one side or the other. But it is also a good example of a subject which has long since gone into a stage of slow evolution, without any major conceptual changes. In what follows, we will review the traditional conception of the IQP, and try to explain refinements to that view in a modern context.

Framing the Issue

Steinitz himself, back in the last century, introduced and explained key features of isolated queen's pawn positions. Not surprisingly for a player who first emphasized the static features of chess positions, he preferred to play against the IQP. Steinitz won several such games versus Zukertort, and one of these became a classic which greatly influenced later generations. Later 'positional' world champions such as Petrosian and Karpov also shared this preference for defending against the IQP, whereas Spassky, Kasparov, and (perhaps surprisingly) Botvinnik were all willing to take on the isolani for the free development and attacking chances it offers. Of course, modern players are well aware of the pluses and minuses of the IQP, and in typically pragmatic fashion, will take up either side when it suits them.

Nimzowitsch does a good job of reviewing the issues surrounding the isolated queen's pawn, and in *My System*, he gives a fairly balanced view of its advantages and disadvantages. But later, in *Chess Praxis* (and this shows how much the theory of the IQP had yet to evolve), he turns dogmatic, claiming that the dynamic advantages of the pawn had become 'innocuous' and ridiculing the IQP: "There are engines of war which even twenty years ago were the terror of all belligerents, and yet, today, they are no more than harmless playthings.

Defensive technique has progressed, and this is the reason, today, the dynamic power of this isolated QP has become to us just a plaything, and we find it difficult to understand how anyone could take to flight before such a weapon." Regarding hanging pawns, interestingly, he says that "unlike the isolated pawn, this weapon is by no means out-of-date."



Let's talk about the general features of the diagrammed position for a moment, a typical one which can arise from openings such as the Queen's Gambit Accepted, Queen's Gambit Semi-Tarrasch, Caro-Kann (Panov-Botvinnik Attack), the 2 c3 Sicilian (after 2...d5), and the Nimzo-Indian Defence. White's isolated queen's pawn can be attacked directly, of course, but years of experience have led to the following general plan for Black:

- restrain the pawn from advancing;
- occupy the square in front of the pawn;
- simplify; and finally
- attack and destroy the weakness or otherwise favourably transform the structure.

Two typical set-ups for Black are:

- ...b6, ...a6, ...c8, ...d6 ...f8; and
- ...a6, ...b5, ...c8, ...d5, perhaps followed by ...d5, ...xc3, and ...d5 with a bind on the light squares.

In a nutshell, that's how traditional theory regarded the black side of such openings.

Interestingly, Nimzowitsch suggested that in general, White should build up slowly in these positions by ♔e3 , ♕e2 , ♖a1 and ♜f1 , and place his king's bishop on d3 or b1 (but, he added, "not b3"). In the modern view, this is entirely too passive, and it's no wonder that Nimzowitsch eventually turned against the IQP, given his view of how White should proceed. Instead, modern players beginning with Botvinnik felt that White should develop rapidly and centralize his rooks (e.g., by ♔g5 , ♕d3 , ♖ad1 , ♜fe1), and then try to play either d5 or probing moves on the kingside. Against Black's second plan above with ...a6, ...b5, etc., White has some new options involving ♕e4-c5 .

Let's see a game from the days in which White's IQP attack was regaining popularity, based on this more active treatment:

Szabo – Van Seters

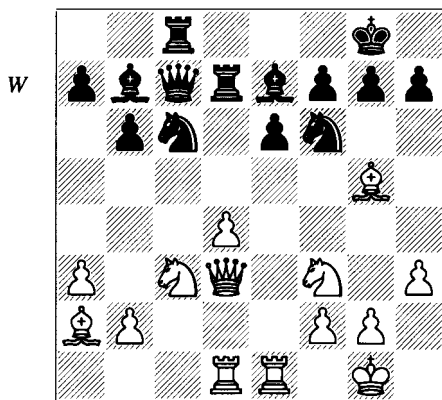
Hilversum 1947

(from the diagram)

11 ♜e1 b6 12 ♕d3 ♙b7 13 ♔g5 ♜c8

Criticized by Pachman, who nevertheless offers this instructive line to show that White maintains some advantage after 13... ♕d5 : 14 ♙xd5 exd5 (14... ♔xg5 15 ♙e4 h6 16 d5 with the initiative, e.g., 16...exd5 17 ♕xd5 ♙f6 18 ♖ad1 !) 15 ♙xe7 ♕xe7 16 ♕g5 ♕g6 17 h4 h6 18 ♕e6 fxe6 19 ♕xg6 ♕xh4 20 ♕xe6+ ♙h8 21 ♕e3 ♖ae8 22 ♕d2 with White better due to his good knight versus Black's bad bishop.

14 ♖ad1 ♕c7 ?! 15 ♙a2 ♜fd8 16 h3 ♜d7 (D)



Black has logically opposed the d-pawn and white queen with his rook on the d-file, but now falls victim to the pawn's 'lust to expand':

17 d5!

This pawn-break epitomizes White's strategy, and its playability tends to determine the first player's success from this type of position. Notice how d5 breaks down Black's solid bastions on e6 and f7, thus increasing the influence of White's a2-bishop. It also activates the rook on d1 and queen on d3, lengthens the range of the rook on e1, and opens up numerous squares for White's knights (d5, d4, and f5, for example). Of course, the move is also based upon tactics, for if Black can win the d-pawn and then simplify, White may just lose.

17... ♕xd5

Unfortunately for Black, 17...exd5 loses to 18 ♙b1 g6 19 ♕xe7 .

18 ♙xd5 ♕d8

And here 18...exd5 loses material after 19 ♕xd5 .

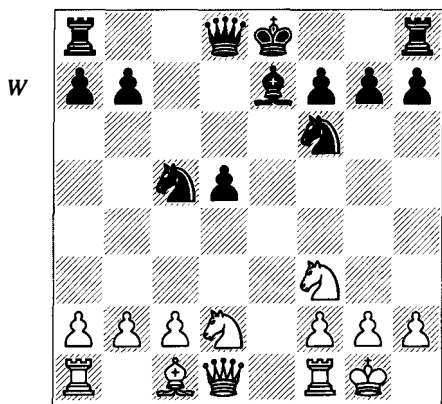
19 ♕e4 exd5 20 ♕xd5 ♔xg5 21 ♕xg5 g6

It's all over; 21... ♕xg5 allows mate after 22 ♕e8+ . Notice how active all of White's pieces have become.

22 ♕h4 h5 23 ♕f6+ ♕xf6 24 ♕xd7 ♕d8 25 ♕e8+ ♙g7 26 ♕xf7+ 1-0

It's remarkable how many such games White has won. Even in modern times, Karpov has allowed a devastating d5 more often than would seem possible from such a brilliant defensive player. On the other hand, he and other defenders have won their own share of games in which White's initiative petered out and his long-term weaknesses eventually allowed Black to take over the game and win. Theoretically, this type of position is still regarded as dynamically balanced.

In general, as Nimzowitsch and others point out, the IQP helps the attack in the middlegame, because it supports aggressive outposts like e5 and c5 and stakes out space, which gives the white pieces more freedom of movement. Conversely, the IQP is held to be a weakness in 'positions of an endgame character' (Nimzowitsch). That's about as far as traditional theory goes, and it holds up in the main; but it's interesting to examine cases of the IQP in the absence of queens. Pachman provides us with these two examples:

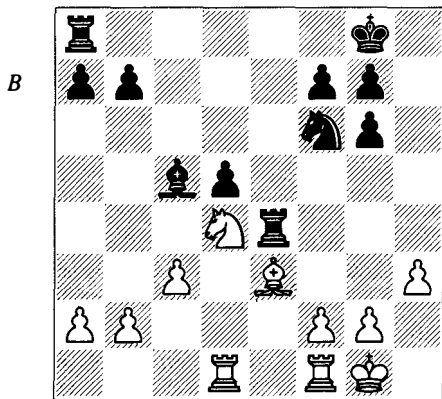
**Botvinnik - Bronstein***World Ch match (game 15), Moscow 1951*

Black has relatively active pieces, but few positive prospects. He cannot challenge the d4-square (as he might were the c5-knight on c6, for example, when ... $\text{e}5$ and even ... $\text{b}6$ could be played at the right moment). Thus White is almost certainly better here. White's next move not only blockades the d-pawn, but also threatens $\text{d}5$.

10 $\text{d}4!$ $\text{d}7$ 11 $\text{f}3$ 0-0 12 $\text{e}5$ $\text{c}8$ 13 $\text{g}5$ $\text{e}8$ 14 $\text{d}3$ $\text{xd}3$ 15 $\text{xd}3$ $\text{g}4$ 16 $\text{e}3$ $\text{c}5$ 17 $\text{h}3$ $\text{g}6?!$

Pachman says: "A typical error in such positions. After the exchange of queens, Black relinquishes all the tactical possibilities of the middlegame...". Better was 17... $\text{h}5$, since 18 $\text{xf}5$ $\text{xd}4$ 19 $\text{hx}5$ $\text{d}5$ 20 $\text{xd}4$ $\text{e}2$ gives enough counterplay.

18 $\text{hxg}6$ $\text{hxg}6$ 19 $\text{a}d1$ $\text{e}4$ 20 $\text{c}3$ (D)

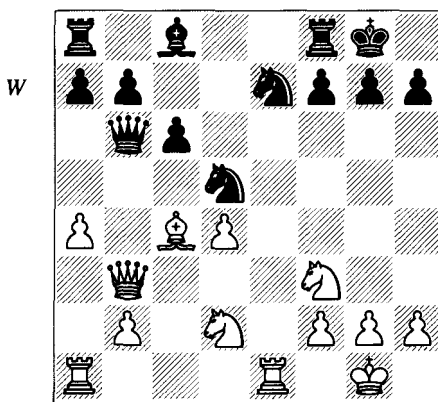


20...b6?

Here 20... $\text{xd}4$ 21 $\text{xd}4$ $\text{xd}4$ 22 $\text{xd}4$ $\text{e}8$ 23 $\text{e}3$ was recommended as only slightly better for White. This brings up a point about the IQP: in the absence of a second weakness, it is often impossible for the side playing against the isolani to convert his advantage in the endgame to a win. The presence of a defensible back-up position (when things go wrong) is one reason why IQP positions are still quite respectable in selected openings.

21 $\text{c}2$ $\text{d}8$ 22 $\text{d}3$ $\text{f}8$ 23 $\text{fd}1$ $\text{e}7$ 24 $\text{f}1$ $\text{d}7$ 25 $\text{g}5$ $\text{c}6$ 26 $\text{b}4$ $\text{f}8$ 27 $\text{e}3$ $\text{e}5$

Here Botvinnik threw away the fruits of his labour by 28 $\text{f}4?$ $\text{e}4$, when he could find nothing better than 29 $\text{f}5$ $\text{e}5$ 30 $\text{f}4$ $\text{e}4$ 31 $\text{g}5$ $\text{e}5$ 32 $\text{f}4$ $\text{e}4$ 33 $\text{g}5$ $\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$. Instead, 28 $\text{xf}6!$ $\text{gxf}6$ 29 $\text{f}4$ $\text{h}5$ 30 $\text{c}4$ $\text{xb}4$ 31 $\text{d}5$ would have won, in view of 31... $\text{d}6$ 32 $\text{xf}6$ $\text{hh}8$ 33 $\text{d}4$ $\text{e}7$ 34 $\text{xd}8$ $\text{xd}8$ 35 $\text{xd}8$ $\text{xd}8$ 36 $\text{e}2$, etc.

**O'Kelly - Euwe***Amsterdam 1950*

A position from the Giuoco Piano. Black's last move, 13... $\text{b}6$, was played on the assumption that the disappearance of queens favours the side playing against the isolated pawn (as in our last example). But this position shows that space, activity, and outposts (in this case for the knights, on e5 and c5) are still advantages in somewhat simplified positions:

14 $\text{a}5!$ $\text{xb}3$ 15 $\text{d}5$ $\text{f}5$ 16 $\text{e}5$ $\text{b}4$ 17 $\text{a}1$

17 $\text{xf}7$ $\text{d}5$ 18 $\text{d}6$ $\text{c}2$ is unclear.

17... $\text{d}5$ 18 $\text{a}6!$ $\text{b}5$ 19 $\text{xd}5$ $\text{cxd}5$ 20 $\text{c}6!$ $\text{xc}6$ 21 $\text{xc}6$ $\text{fe}8$

At this point, the game was agreed drawn, but later analysis (quoted by Pachman) demonstrated White's large edge. One critical line, for example, would be 21...♖fe8 22 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 23 f3 ♖e1+ 24 ♜f2 ♖b1 25 ♜c5 ♖xb2+ 26 ♜g3 g5 27 ♖c7 ♜g7 28 ♖xa7 threatening ♖b7 with a winning advantage. To the end, White's open files and c5 outpost outweighed the weakness on d4; and in fact, 13...♞b6 is now considered inferior. We might fairly conclude that there are no hard-and-fast rules about simplification in IQP positions; one's best judgement has to be used and the individual characteristics of each position taken into account.

The Modern IQP Environment

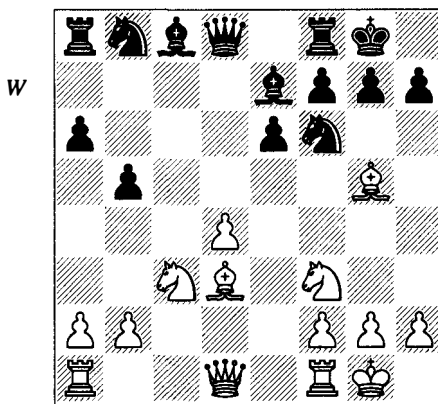
How is the IQP regarded today? To begin with, all those older fights about whether such a pawn is strong or weak have disappeared. Statements like Nimzowitsch's above (from *Chess Praxis*) are not only insupportable but irrelevant in today's chess environment. The IQP still appears in many sound variations which are indisputably playable; but it has also proven a risky proposition in other, formerly standard, positions. The fact is, no one cares any more whether it's good or bad to have an isolated queen's pawn; they just care about how good or bad a particular pawn is in a particular position. This is part of the 'rule-independence' and concrete analytical approach which we will discuss at length in Part 2.

It might be useful to just list a few of the most common isolated pawn positions in modern chess and see in what ways they differ:

QGA

In the Queen's Gambit Accepted, many lines lead to IQP positions. One I find very interesting arises after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 ♜f3 ♜f6 4 e3 e6 5 ♖xc4 c5 6 0-0 a6 7 ♖d3!?. This is a sophisticated retreat which anticipates a loss of tempo following ...b5, which can now be met by a4. White also wants to play dxc5 and e4 in many lines, so Black usually creates an IQP by 7...cxd4 8 exd4. Then a typical line is 8...♙e7 9 ♜c3 0-0 10 ♙g5 b5 (D).

Now, instead of the traditional attempts to attack by ♖e1, or by ♞e2 with ♜fd1, White



aims directly at the queenside by either 11 ♖c1 ♙b7 12 ♙xf6! ♙xf6 13 ♜e4 (targeting c5) 13...♙d5 14 ♜e5 with advantage; or by 11 a4 b4 12 ♜e4 (12 ♜b1, intending ♜bd2-b3-c5 or ♜bd2-c4, is also very promising) 12...♙b7 13 ♜xf6+ ♙xf6 14 ♙xf6 ♞xf6 15 ♜e5 ♞g5 16 g3, also with advantage, since 16...♜c6 can be met by 17 ♜xc6 (or 17 ♙e4 ♜xe5 18 ♙xb7) 17...♙xc6 18 ♙xh7+ (analysis by Eingorn).

This variation illustrates two particularly modern tendencies: the willingness to retreat before developing (by ♙d3, which also takes strength away from the key d5-square); and the willingness to play with the IQP in even simplified positions (see the various exchanges on f6). Also, we see here an example in which the mobility of the IQP was not an issue; but rather, the space and support squares around it. Overall, this is an example of a 'safe' IQP which, whether White gets the advantage or not, should not lose the game for him.

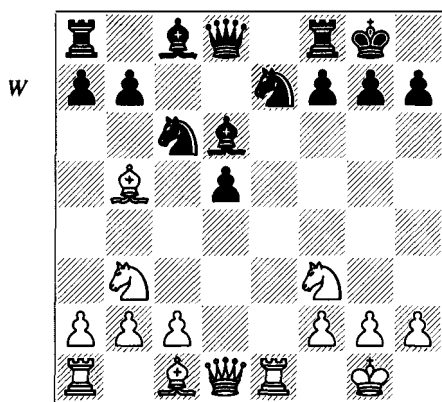
French Tarrasch

Keene points out that Tarrasch had such a love for isolated queen's pawns that he gave up the variation of the French Defence which still bears his name today, i.e. 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜d2. In his notes to Tarrasch-Walbrodt, match (game 8), Nuremberg 1894, he comments about 3 ♜d2: "the correct method of play which Walbrodt here selects refutes the move utterly: 3...c5! 4 exd5 exd5! ...". His reasoning is that White will soon have to grant Black the dreaded IQP after either dxc5 or ...cxd4.

Today, this line is indeed regularly played by Black, but the issue is not whether 3 ♜d2 is

'refuted'; but rather: is White's advantage of a serious nature, or does it dissipate into early equality or a drawn ending? Once again, Karpov provided some modern ammunition for White's side, winning some beautiful technical battles early in his career; although later on, he preferred 3 ♘c3 as his weapon against the French. In my opinion, this is a 'middle ground' case for the IQP, in that a sophisticated player of White will be able to neutralize Black's activity, but will have great difficulty bringing home a full point or even maintaining a long-term advantage. One issue is that a great many of the standard endings are drawn, even ones with only a white knight versus Black's 'bad' bishop. Whatever the exact reasons, this line does indeed lead to a high percentage of draws.

Let's look at a few fragments to get a feel for the issues: 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 $\odot$ d2 c5 4 exd5 exd5 5 $\odot$ gf3 $\odot$ c6 6 $\oplus$ b5 $\oplus$ d6 7 dxc5 $\oplus$ xc5 8 $\odot$ b3 $\oplus$ d6 9 0-0 $\odot$ ge7 10 $\oplus$ e1 0-0 (*D*).



a) 11 ♔d3 h6 12 h3 ♚f5 13 ♔d2!? ♚c7 14 ♚c3 ♚d6 15 ♔b5 (15 ♔xf5 ♚xf5 16 ♚bd4 ♔e4 17 ♚xc6 bxc6 18 ♔e5 =) 15...♔b6! 16 a4? d4! (the lust to expand! When Black can safely stake out space, he should be fine) 17 ♔d2 ♚d8 18 ♚c1? (trying to get to d3, but missing a tactic; 18 ♚e2 ♔d7 is only slightly in Black's favour) 18...♔e3! 19 ♚e2 (19 ♔xe3 dxe3 20 ♚xd6 exf2+ 21 ♔h2 ♚xd6 22 ♔e8+ ♔h7 is too good for Black) 19...♚xc2 22 ♔d2 and White was clearly better in Adams-Lputian, Ljubliana 1995.

b) 11 ♠g5 ♠g4 12 ♠h4 ♠e8 13 ♠g3 ♠xg3
14 hxg3 ♠b6 15 a4! (15 ♠d3 a5! 16 a4 ♠f5 17
♠xe8+ ♠xe8 18 ♠xf5 ♠xf5 19 ♠d2 h6 leads
to equality, Przewoznik-Lputian, Lvov 1986)

15...h6?! (15...a6 16 ♖xc6 ♗xf3 17 ♜xf3 bxc6 18 ♜e3!? and White is slightly better, according to Ivanchuk; that is true, but after 18...♜xe3 19 ♜xe3 ♘f5, Black's position is compact and one would expect a draw to result from good play) 16 ♜d2 ♖xf3 17 gxf3 ♜ad8 18 f4 a6 19 ♖f1 and again, White is better (bishop versus knight), but not greatly so, Ivanchuk-Yusupov, Candidates match (game 1), Brussels 1991.

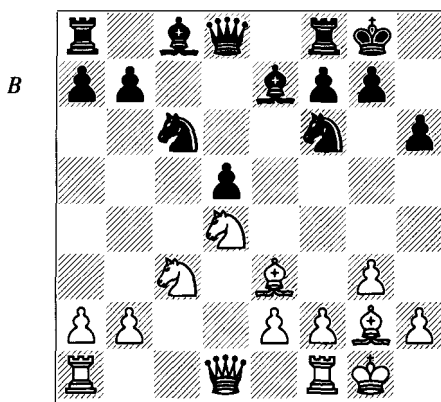
QGD Tarrasch

One of the best-known of isolated pawn variations (and another point of dispute between Nimzowitsch and Tarrasch) occurs in the Tarrasch Defence to the Queen's Gambit, the main line of which leads to an isolated black queen's pawn:

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 c3 c5

The Tarrasch Defence has an interesting history. Tarrasch himself thought 3... Δ f6 inferior due to 4 $\text{\textcircled{a}}$ g5, and said that he “instinctively recognized” 3...c5 as the “right antidote to the Queen’s Gambit”. He actually believed that isolating Black’s d-pawn would give the second player a positional advantage(!), and thus that 3...c5 should be met by 4 e3.

4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♖f3 ♜c6 6 g3 ♖f6 7 ♙g2
 ♙e7 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♙g5 cxd4 10 ♖xd4 h6 11 ♙e3
 (D)



The move 6 g3 was Rubinstein's influential contribution. A series of nice victories with this move threw both the Tarrasch Defence and the IQP itself into a tailspin in the minds of his contemporaries in the 1910s and 1920s. With Botvinnik and other dynamic players in the 1930s, the IQP began a steady recovery, but

only in other openings. Remarkably, it wasn't until Spassky adopted the Tarrasch Defence in his 1969 world championship match versus Petrosian that 3...c5 itself again achieved respectability in the minds of most players and theoreticians. Even then, the books gave the main lines as leading to a slight but definite advantage for White, and relatively few players followed Spassky's suit. After another hiatus, Garry Kasparov himself used the Tarrasch Defence to fight his way through the 1983-4 Candidates Matches to his first world championship match, employing it successfully against Beliavsky, Korchnoi, and Smyslov. Naturally, players were soon playing 3...c5 at every opportunity. But, again, the bandwagon screeched to a halt when Kasparov lost two critical games in the world championship against Karpov and moved on to the greener fields of the Tartakower Queen's Gambit, Grünfeld, and King's Indian. Today, the Tarrasch Defence is again considered rather marginal, and top-flight practical results favour White.

Given this history, it would be rash to make any predictions about the future of 3...c5; but it does seem that the isolated queen's pawn it creates is more subject to attack than the ones we looked at in the last two examples. In the diagram, for example, that bishop on g2 exerts a lot of influence in comparison with the case of the QGA above, in which Black's bishop on e7 was nowhere near as effective against White's isolated d-pawn. At this point in time, at any rate, White's results are rather good, and there are only a few strong players who are willing to defend the Tarrasch. Let's look at a few excerpts from Karpov's games to get a feel for how White has been posing problems for Black:

Karpov – Illescas

Leon 1993

(from the previous diagram)

11...♖e8 12 ♖c1

A move which is currently giving Black fits. But also very instructive was 12 ♗b3 ♘a5 13 ♗c2 ♙g4 14 ♘f5 ♜c8 15 ♙d4 ♙c5 16 ♙xc5 ♜xc5 17 ♘e3 ♙e6 18 ♚ad1 ♗c8 19 ♗a4 ♚d8 20 ♚d3 a6 21 ♚fd1 with an obvious advantage, Karpov-Kasparov, World Ch match (game 9), Moscow 1984.

12...♙f8 13 a3!?

A high-class waiting move, typical of Karpov, which stops ...♘b4, prepares ♘a4 (so that ...♗a5 can be met by b4), and threatens to expand on the queenside in many lines. Another idea is that after ♗b3, if Black attacks by ...♘a5, the queen has a comfortable retreat at a2, from which point it still attacks Black's IQP. But 13 a3!? is still rather slow; in fact, the more popular 13 ♘xc6 bxc6 14 ♘a4 (or 14 ♙d4) has had excellent results for White of late, and even 13 ♘b3 and 13 ♗c2 seem to lead to some advantage. Keep in mind, however, that Tarrasch experts, who know more than I do, may know how to hold the balance in such positions.

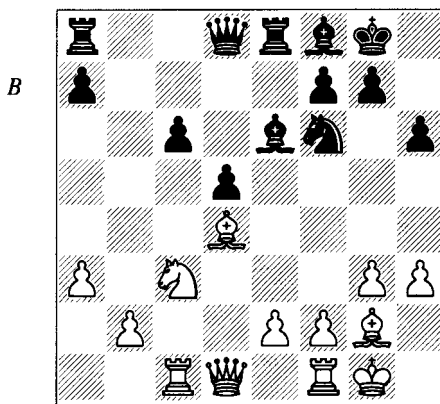
13...♙g4

13...♘e5? 14 ♗b3 and 13...♙e6 14 ♗a4 are not improvements.

14 h3 ♙e6 15 ♘xc6!?

The typical transition from an isolated pawn to the isolated pawn couple. 15 ♘a4 seems advantageous as well, e.g., 15...♗d7 (15...♘e4!?) 16 ♘h2 ♜ac8 17 ♘c5 ♙xc5 18 ♜xc5, etc.

15...bxc6 16 ♙d4! (D)



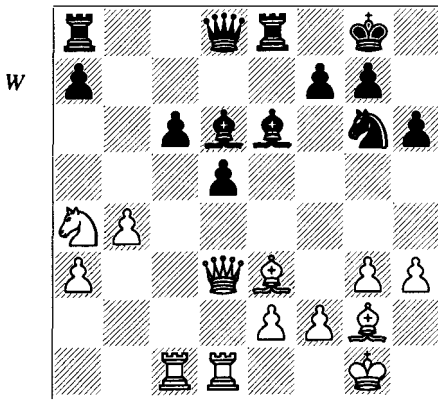
16...♙d7!

The nature of White's advantage seems clear after either 16...♘d7 17 b4 (or even 17 e4!), 16...c5 17 ♙xf6 ♗xf6 18 ♘xd5 ♗xb2 19 ♗a4, or 16...♘e4 17 ♘xe4 dxe4 18 ♙c5 ♙xc5 19 ♜xc5 ♙d5 20 b4 ♗e7 21 e3 ♚ad8 22 ♗e2, as occurred in J.Watson-Crispin, Hawaii 1998.

17 ♗d3 ♘h7 18 ♙e3! ♙d6

Karpov mentions 18...♘g5 19 ♙xg5 ♗xg5 20 e4 and 18...♘f6 19 ♚fd1, with a clear advantage in both cases. White's next move threatens 20 ♘xd5!.

19 ♖fd1 ♗e6 20 b4 ♜f8 21 ♜a4 ♜g6 (D)



Now Black's pawns have been utterly immobilized, on which grounds alone White's strategy must be deemed successful.

22 ♜c3! ♗d7 23 ♜c5 ♗xc5 24 ♗xc5!

White has two bishops, a bind, and central pressure, whereas Black's bishop on d7 is miserable. Black tried to dig up some counterplay with the exchange sacrifice 24...♜xe2!? 25 ♗e3 ♜e7 26 ♗f1 ♜xe3 27 ♜xe3 ♜xe3 28 fxe3 ♜e8 29 ♜f2, but White won shortly.

These three isolated queen's pawn openings vary both in the degree to which the IQP-owner is the aggressor as well as in soundness. The interested reader is urged to study examples from other openings. For example, in the 1 e4 c5 2 c3 Sicilian, two interesting IQP positions arise after 2...d5 3 exd5 ♜xd5 4 d4 ♜f6 5 ♜f3, and now 5...e6 6 ♗e2 cxd4 7 cxd4 ♜c6 8 0-0 ♗e7 as well as 5...♗g4 6 ♗e2 e6 7 0-0 ♜c6 8 ♗e3 cxd4 9 cxd4 ♗e7. In both cases, ♜c3 is best met by ...♜d6, allowing a rook to come to d8 and covering critical squares like f4 and b4, when Black seems to achieve equality. In the Nimzo-Indian, Black has been extremely comfortable in the line 1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♜c3 ♗b4 4 e3 c5 5 ♗d3 d5 6 ♜e2 cxd4 7 exd4 ♜c6 8 cxd5 ♜xd5 9 0-0 0-0, mainly because White's knight on e2 simply fails to have the effect that it did on f3 in earlier examples. This means that ...e5 is often possible, for example.

To conclude: the evolution of the IQP in modern chess has been consistent with principles worked out long ago. The difference today is in the detailed understanding of specific positions, and players' willingness to deploy their forces in unstereotyped ways.

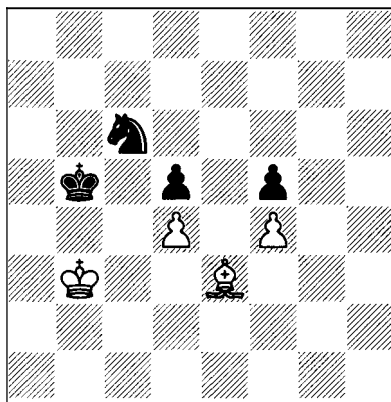
6 Minor-Piece Issues

As the reader will be reminded throughout this book, the relative value of minor pieces (the bishops and knights) stands at the core of modern chess. Time and again, superiority in the middlegame is decided by who has the better minor pieces. There are also a number of common material transformations that give rise to dynamic possibilities, most prominently the exchange sacrifice (rook for bishop or knight), but also combinations of two or three minor pieces versus the queen. Given that reality, it's rather surprising to see how unimaginatively the traditional texts treat issues regarding minor pieces, and how late in chess history their roles came to be reassessed. In this chapter, I will review classical theory, giving a very conservative view and deferring discussion of major theoretical advances to Part 2. To wrap up the discussion, I take a theoretical and statistical look at the long-standing contention that a queen and knight are superior to a queen and bishop.

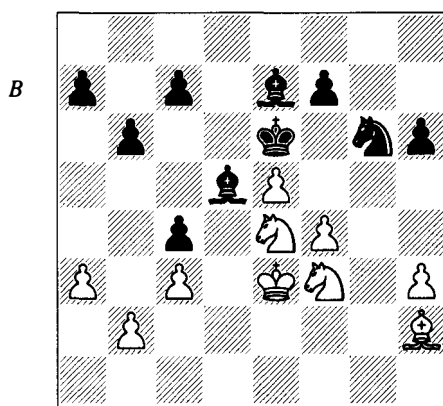
The Conventional View

Nimzowitsch, a brilliant handler of both knights and bishops, said very little about either. In a chapter from *My System* on the two bishops (a topic he even considered omitting as a separate subject), he discusses the bishop versus knight issue in the most elementary possible fashion, first showing an ending with a bishop escorting in a passed h-pawn versus a remotely-placed and helpless knight. Then he gives this standard example of a good knight versus a bad bishop in an ending (D):

I only bother to give the diagram because it seems as though every instructional and middle-game book since time immemorial has shown some such thing, and often, that's about the extent of their minor-piece discussion! Anyway, Nimzowitsch next talks about endings with two bishops versus two knights (or versus a bishop and knight), in which the two bishops systematically hem in the knights and eventually win.



The most interesting such ending is this one, because it relates to our Ruy Lopez Exchange Variation discussion from Chapter 4:



Harmonist – Tarrasch
Breslau 1889

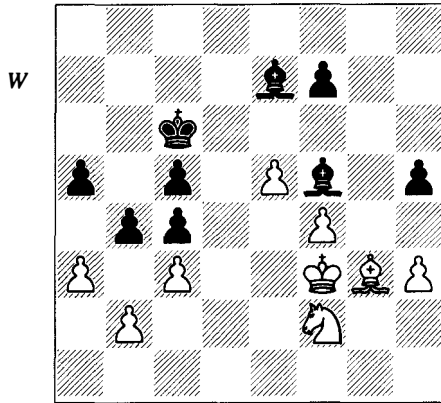
Black has two bishops, but his majority is crippled (from an earlier ...dxc6 in the Ruy Lopez), and White's knights are reasonably centralized. Nevertheless, Black has excellent winning chances. He begins by restricting the white knight on f3 and then exchanging it:

28...c5! 29 ♖g3 ♜h4 30 ♜xh4 ♜xh4 31 ♜e4 ♜e7 32 ♜g1 ♜c6 33 ♜f2 ♜d7!

Now the idea is to infiltrate with the king to d5 and place the bishop dynamically on f5, to

tie down White's pieces. Then the queenside pawns will advance.

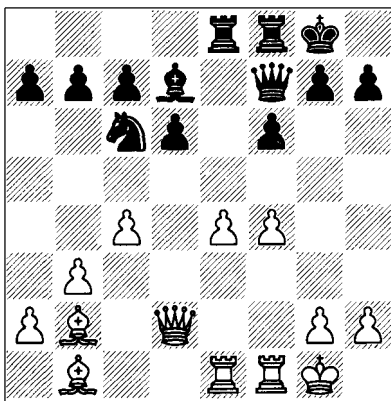
34 ♖g3 ♜d5 35 ♞f2 h5 36 ♜f3 ♙f5 37 ♜e3
b5 38 ♜f3 a5 39 ♜e3 b4 40 ♜f3 ♜c6 (D)



Heading for a4, so White has to straighten out the black pawns, after which a passed pawn escorted by bishops will decide in the conventional manner:

41 axb4 cxb4 42 cxb4 axb4 43 ♞e4 ♜d5 44
♞d6 ♙xd6 45 exd6 c3 46 bxc3 b3 0-1

Finally, Nimzowitsch gives this position, which is of particular interest because others have also used it (or something extremely similar) to explain how knights like closed positions:



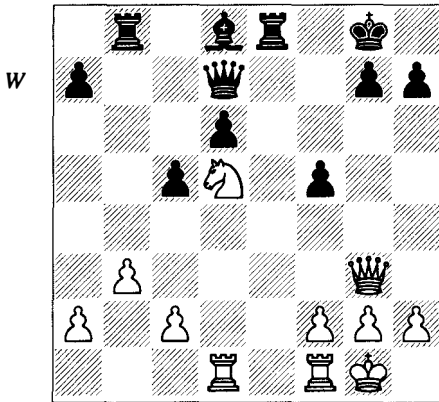
Nimzowitsch introduces this section of the chapter by saying "We have now done enough for the glorification of the bishops, and a few words may be added on situations in which they do not cut such a good figure." Of the diagram,

he merely says that 'even' in that situation, "it seems to me that Black can maintain himself against the Horwitz bishops." The idea is that Black's ...f6! is supposed to be a big improvement on a position with ...f5, which would allow the bishops free scope. Well, I'm not going to do any complex analysis of this position, but I'd wager that most modern GMs would jump at the chance to be White here. He has several ways to make progress, for example, ♜h1 followed by ♞g1 and then g4-g5. Also queenside expansion to drive back the knight looks promising. After b4, assuming that Black can defend his queenside against a well-timed c5 or piece infiltration after b5, White can always play b5 and kick the knight, in order to be free to play f5 (without allowing ...♞e5), followed by g4-g5 to attack the kingside. One reason I bring this up is to emphasize a theme of Part 2: when one has the knight-pair versus two bishops, trying to wait around in a semi-closed position without knight outposts is almost always hopeless. Modern practice shows that, more often than not, some kind of dynamic opening of the position is necessary to fight effectively against the bishops, and it's obviously too late to do that in the diagrammed position.

Well, I have a stack of books in front of me with standard examples of unassailable knights on wonderful outposts versus miserably immobile bishops, as well as of devastating bishops versus prospectless knights or bad bishops. To illustrate classical theory, we will look at a few of these. But I have to say that Suba's objection to instructional and middlegame books, that they show only the art of playing against weak opposition, could hardly be more true with regards to their treatment of minor pieces. The reader interested in more exciting examples and a broader view might want to turn immediately to Chapters 4-8 of Part 2. Also, I should note that a recent book, Steve Mayer's *Bishop versus Knight: The Verdict*, is a marvellous exception to this trend, especially in the way that he gives groundbreaking attention to 'overrated knights', 'overrated bishops', to the many examples of 'bad' bishops which are strong, and to the misunderstood relation of the minor pieces to open and closed positions.

But to return to this chapter, let's look at some classically good knights. Romanovsky

devotes many examples to knight monsters which dominate the board, for example:

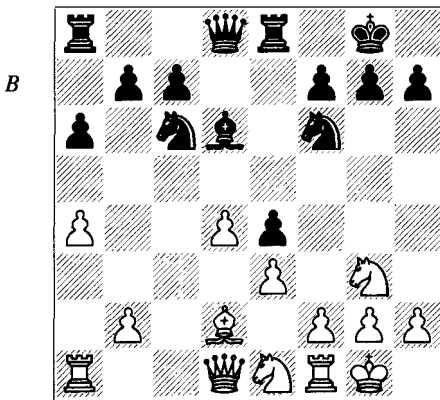


Levenfish – Dubinin
Leningrad 1934

As so often in these textbook examples, the knight on d5 is not only a killer, but just to rub it in, Black's bishop is classically 'bad' and his d-pawn is backward and on an open file. Here's how White converts:

20 ♖f1 ♗e6 21 ♜f4 ♖xe1+ 22 ♖xe1 ♙a5 23 ♜d5! ♙d8 24 h4 ♜b7 25 c4 ♜f7 26 ♜f3 ♜g8 27 ♜e2 g6 28 h5 ♜f8 29 h6 ♙g5 30 ♜b2 ♜g8 31 f4 ♙d8 32 ♜f6+ ♙xf6 33 ♜xf6 d5 34 cxd5 1-0

His other examples are even more one-sided. By contrast, the following one, from Pachman, at least includes some subtle points:



Ahues – Alekhine
Bad Nauheim 1936

Black is better here, since his pawn on e4 cramps White and White's bishop on d2 is particularly bad. One might expect a move such as 15...g6, restricting the g3-knight and preparing to attack by ...h5-h4. But Alekhine's solution is classically elegant:

15...♙xg3! 16 hxg3 ♜e7!

This knight is heading for the unassailable d5-square, whereas White's bishop looks worse than ever on d2. So in a sense, this is just a case of superior minor pieces. But 15...♙xg3 has two other functions:

a) it releases potential pressure on e4 from the g3-knight, which matters if White plays f3. It is the e4-pawn which keeps the d2-bishop imprisoned;

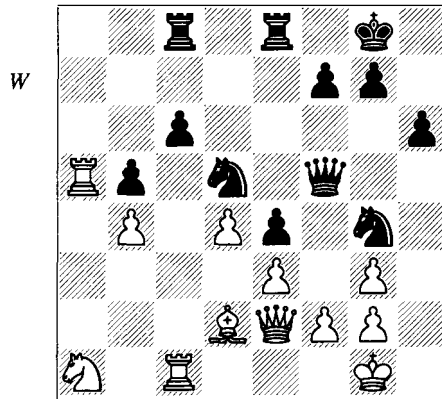
b) White's pawn structure after hxg3 is particularly vulnerable to attack, as the rest of the game shows.

17 b4 ♜d7 18 ♜c2 ♜ed5 19 ♜a3 b5!

This prevents White's idea of getting his knight to e5 via c4.

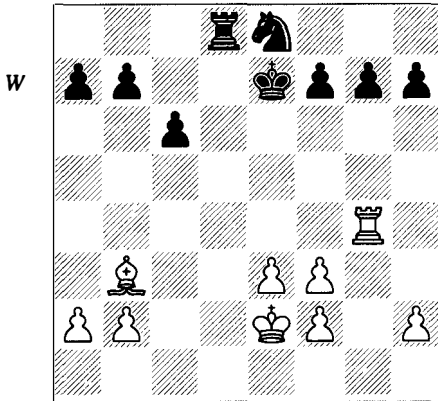
20 axb5 axb5 21 ♜e2 c6 22 ♜c2 ♜f5 23 ♜fc1 h6 24 ♜a5 ♜ac8 25 ♜a1? ♜g4 (D)

Suddenly ...♜h5 and ...♜e6-f6 just wins. White had to try 25 f3, but his kingside and centre would have been very vulnerable.



26 ♜f1 ♗e6 27 ♖xb5 ♜f6 28 ♜bc5 ♜xf2 29 ♜e1 ♜d3+ 30 ♜d1 ♜f1+ 31 ♙e1 ♜f2 0-1

In Part 2, we will devote a few chapters to the imbalances ♙ vs ♜, and 2♙ vs 2♜ (or vs ♜+♙). For the sake of filling in our picture of traditional minor-piece theory, let's look at a classic example of how the bishop can beat the knight in a simplified open position:



Najdorf – Stahlberg

Candidates tournament, Zurich 1953

This makes a good example, because Black has no weaknesses and White does: his doubled f-pawns and isolated h-pawn. So, as opposed to those pure bishop-versus-knight endings with pawns on both sides of the board (the side with the bishop tends to win almost all of those), this one is not necessarily winning for the first player at all. But the game more realistically illustrates just how difficult Black's defence is, and may make clear why the mere possession of a bishop versus a knight in the ending tends to be so large an advantage:

26 ♖e4+ ♜f8 27 ♖a4 a6 28 ♖f4 f6? 29 ♖h4 h6 30 ♖h5

Now White is done loosening up Black's pawn structure for the moment. Pachman criticizes Black's 28th and makes a very perceptive comment: "Generally, the pawns should be placed on squares of opposite colour to the bishop but ... the move ...f6 actually increases the range and power of the bishop..." In fact, that 'rule' about putting pawns on squares of colour opposite to the bishop, repeated in most instructional books, should be relegated to the scrap heap, in my opinion. There are simply way too many exceptions, and a player is much better off reasoning for himself what the best defensive set-up is.

30... ♜c7 31 f4 ♜e7 32 ♖c5 ♖d6 33 ♖c1? b6?

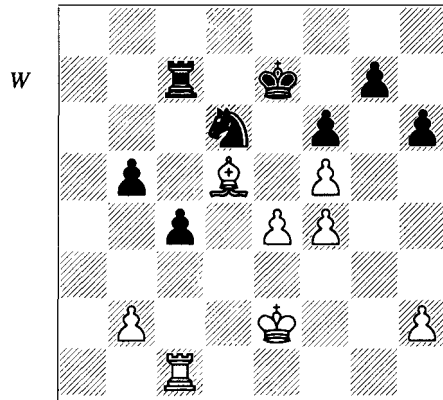
Again, Black is trying to put all his pawns on dark squares, but the toughest set-up to crack would have been Pachman's suggestion 33...f5!, holding up the white pawns and opening up the

comfortable f6-square for the king. White should have played 33 f5 himself, to forestall this. He does so now.

34 f5! c5 35 f4 ♜c6 36 a4!

Black is mobilizing his majority, and White will need the open a-file at some point.

36...b5 37 ♖c2 ♜e8 38 ♖e4 ♜c7 39 ♖d5 c4 40 e4 ♜d6 41 axb5 axb5 (D)



White has maximized the potential of his bishop, which is now clearly superior to the knight. What's more, he can slowly prepare the advance e5.

42 ♜e3 ♖a7 43 ♖g1 ♜f8 44 ♜d4 ♜c7 45 ♜c1! ♜b7!

Necessary, since White was threatening 46 b3, which can now be answered by 46...♜c5!. But this gives White time to take the a-file and get his centre pawns moving.

46 ♖a1 ♜c5 47 ♖a8+ ♜e7 48 e5 ♜b3+ 49 ♜c3 ♜c1

Pachman cites lengthy analysis to show that White is winning. The two most interesting subvariations are 49...♜c5 50 ♖a7+ ♜d8 51 ♖e4 fxe5 52 ♖xg7 with f6 next, and 49...fxe5 50 fxe5 ♜c5 51 ♖a7+ ♜e8 52 ♖f7+ ♜f8 53 e6 ♖xf5 54 ♖g6 ♖e5 55 ♖f7+, and White is winning.

50 ♖g8 ♜e2+ 51 ♜d2 ♜xf4 52 ♖xg7+ ♜d8 53 exf6! ♜d7

The tactical point is 53...♜xd5 54 ♖g8+ ♜d7 55 f7.

54 ♖xd7+ ♜xd7 55 ♖c6+! 1-0

Since after 55...♜d6 56 ♖xb5, the other c-pawn falls as well. The classical view that the bishop is better than the knight with pawns on both sides of the board (which is the normal

case) is just as true today. This to a large extent accounts for the extremes of hardship players will undergo in order to hang on to their bishops.

Opposite Colours Attract?

The theory of opposite-coloured bishops hasn't changed much over the years. The endgame books show us the same clever draws with up to three-pawn deficits, and the same tricky wins in positions we would have sworn were drawn. The powers of unlike bishops in the middlegame are well-known and summarized by the phrase 'opposite-coloured bishops favour the attacker'. Middlegame and instructional books cover this ground so well that it seems pointless to try to add to it. Dvoretsky, for example, has a very thorough treatment of opposite-coloured bishops in the middlegame in his *Positional Play*, which I highly recommend.

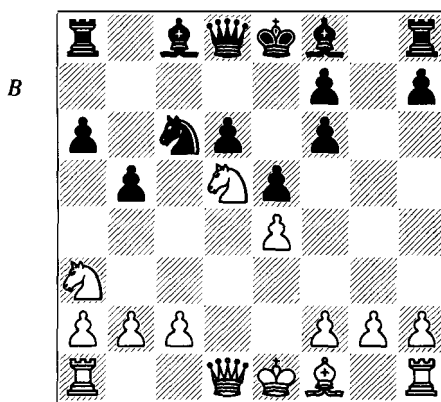
But it does seem that there are long-term historical changes in the attitude towards such bishops. Today's players seem to be willing to accept them more often, at an earlier stage of the game, as a positive type of imbalance. We will see many modern games in this book in which the properties of opposite-coloured bishops contribute to a successful attack. But what about their alleged drawishness? In older books, we used to read annotations about games in which unlike bishops arose in the opening or early middlegame, with claims that, e.g., "this line tends to be drawish because of the opposite-coloured bishops". But not only have the gods placed the middlegame before the endgame, we have also seen great masters win the most innocent-looking of endings with unlike bishops. Tal had a few classic victories in opposite-coloured bishop endings which raised eyebrows, and such endings vary widely, both as to whether they can be drawn, and as to the ease with which such a draw may be obtained. Furthermore, we are now aware that the distance is very large indeed between early-arising opposite-coloured bishops and endings which are in fact drawn due to their presence. So, overall, I would suggest that very few of today's players wishing to draw put their faith in the acquisition of unlike bishops in the opening or early middlegame stage.

The exceptions to that generality are quite interesting, however; they show how players can be attracted to unlike bishops in their opening preparation for the purpose of 'at worst' getting a draw with Black. Two such openings come to mind which regularly produce opposite-coloured bishops: the Sveshnikov Sicilian and the 6...c5 gambit against the Sämisch Variation of the King's Indian. Kramnik is a master of the Sveshnikov with Black, and regularly enters into positions with unlike bishops which are sometimes inferior, but which he knows that he can draw, for example:

Svidler – Kramnik

Tilburg 1997

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♙c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♙f6 5 ♙c3 e5 6 ♙db5 d6 7 ♙g5 a6 8 ♙a3 b5 9 ♙xf6 gxf6 10 ♙d5 (D)



10...♙g7

Roughly the same pattern was seen in Svidler-Kramnik, Linares 1998: 10...f5 11 c3 ♙g7 12 exf5 ♙xf5 13 ♙c2 0-0 14 ♙ce3 ♙e6 15 ♙d3 f5 16 0-0 ♙a7 17 ♙h5 ♙af7 18 g4 e4 19 ♙c2 fxg4 20 ♙xe4 ♙e5 21 ♙h6 ♙h8 22 ♙h1 ♙xd5 (the capture which introduces opposite-coloured bishops) 23 ♙xd5 ♙e7 24 ♙h4 ♙xd5 25 ♙xd8 ♙xd8 26 ♙xd5 ♙f5 27 ♙ad1 ♙df8 28 ♙g2 ♙h5 29 ♙h1 ♙f6 30 ♙d3 ♙hf5 1/2-1/2.

11 ♙d3

And once again: 11 c3 f5 12 exf5 ♙xf5 13 ♙c2 ♙e6 14 g3 0-0 15 ♙g2 ♙b8 16 0-0 ♙d7 17 ♙h5 f5 18 ♙ad1 e4 19 f3 ♙xd5 20 ♙xd5 ♙e7 21 ♙d2 d5 22 ♙h3 ♙b6 23 ♙g2 ♙h6 24 ♙g5 ♙g6 1/2-1/2 Ivanchuk-Kramnik, Moscow 1995.

11...♖e7 12 ♖xe7 ♗xe7 13 c4 f5 14 0-0 0-0
15 ♗f3 bxc4 16 ♖xc4 d5 17 exd5 e4 18 ♗e3
♙b7 19 ♗fd1 ♙xd5

Entering into the opposite-coloured bishop ending with heavy pieces, which is hopelessly drawn in spite of White's outside passed pawn.

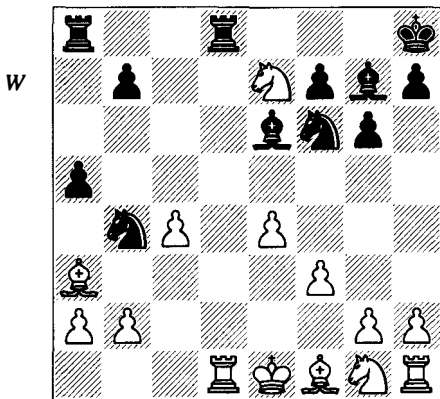
20 ♖b6 ♗ad8 21 ♖xd5 ♗xd5 22 ♙xa6
♗xd1+ 23 ♗xd1 ♙xb2 24 ♗d5 ♗f6 25 ♙c4
♗d8 26 ♗xd8+ 1/2-1/2

What is remarkable here is the degree of preparation which allows Black to enter into such lines without falling victim to a classic domination from the d5 outpost, for example, or to some other attack based upon Black's light-square weaknesses. It's also characteristic of the depth of modern openings that Kramnik undoubtedly knew which of these endgame situations were safely drawn. On the other hand, there's always the danger that the ending *won't* be drawn: ironically, Kramnik himself recently lost one of the most important games of his young career in an opposite-coloured bishop ending (to Shirov in game 4 of their WCC qualification match).

The following game illustrates another opening in which the unlike bishops play an important role, with Kramnik as White this time:

Kramnik – Shirov Bundesliga 1992/3

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 ♙g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6
♙e3 c5 7 dxc5 dxc5 8 ♗xd8 ♗xd8 9 ♙xc5
♖c6 10 ♙a3 a5 11 ♗d1 ♙e6 12 ♖d5 ♖b4! 13
♖xe7+ ♗h8 (D)



14 ♗xd8+

This is all theory, and an example of modern dynamism in the openings. Another opposite-coloured bishop position arose after 14 ♖d5 ♖c2+ 15 ♗f2 ♖xa3 16 bxa3 b5! 17 ♖h3 ♗ac8! 18 ♙e2 bxc4 19 ♖hf4 ♖xd5 20 ♖xd5 ♙xd5 21 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 22 exd5 ♙d4+ 23 ♗g3 c3 24 ♗c1 ♙e3 25 ♗c2 ♙d2 26 ♙b5 ♗c5 27 ♙c6 ♗c4 in Bigler – Har-Zvi, Biel 1993, and here the opposite-coloured bishops did *not* suffice to draw for White, since Black was able to march his king all the way to the queenside and use his active pieces to tie White down.

14...♗xd8 15 ♖d5

White should not be tempted by 15 ♙xb4? axb4 16 ♖d5 ♗a8 17 ♖xb4 ♖d7!, when Black is slightly better (Kramnik). Maybe that position should be in my discussion of the power of the two bishops. After all, White is a mere three pawns to the good and the queens are off!

15...♖c2+

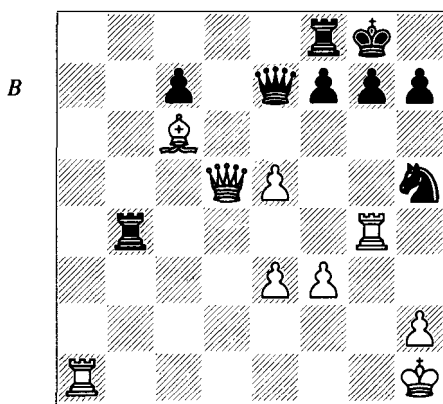
Now the game went 16 ♖d2 ♖xa3 17 bxa3 b5 18 ♖h3 1/2-1/2, in view of 18...bxc4 19 ♙xc4 ♖xd5 20 exd5 ♙xd5 21 ♙xd5 ♗xd5+ 22 ♗e2 =. But a more interesting choice was 16 ♗f2!? ♖xa3 17 bxa3 b5 18 ♖h3 ♗c8!? 19 ♖hf4 bxc4 with another opposite-coloured bishop ending following 20 ♖xe6 fxe6 21 ♖b6 ♖xe4+! 22 ♗e3! ♗c6 23 ♗xe4 ♗xb6 24 ♙xc4 ♗c6! 25 ♖d3 (25 ♙d3 ♙b2 26 a4 ♗c1 =) 25...♙f8 26 a4 ♗g7 = (Shirov).

Thus, the modern player will sometimes still rely upon the drawing powers of opposite-coloured bishops, but primarily in situations in which the precise nature of the resulting ending can be foreseen. Otherwise, the renowned attacking properties of those bishops in the middlegame, as well as the unreliable nature of many endings with them, do not allow one to depend upon the unlike bishops' allegedly drawish nature.

Folklore or Reality? Queens and Knights

There are some old arguments about minor pieces which I want to address in this book in the light of modern experience. In Part 2 (Chapter 4), I will attempt to draw some definitive conclusions about the long-standing dispute regarding the value of the two bishops. Here I

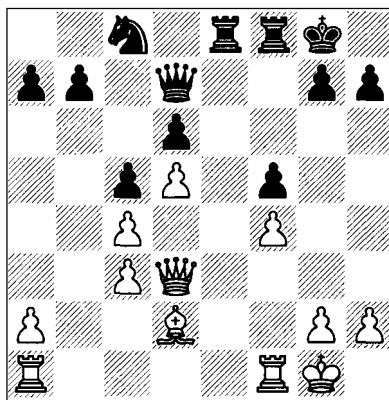
would like to examine what might be called a received bit of conventional wisdom. Mayer calls it 'Capablanca's Theorem': that the queen and knight tend to be better than the queen and bishop in the ending. This is an almost universal belief; Jeremy Silman even extends its application beyond the endgame to proclaim what he calls "a little rule", that "*In general, a Queen and Knight is a better combination of pieces than a Queen and Bishop*" (his italics). And this seems to be part of the general consciousness. Several books mention it, and some of my students have stated it to me as if it were just common knowledge. As for top players, here's an example:



Ivanchuk – Shirov
Belgrade 1997

Shirov comments: "Black's pieces are a little better than White's (knight versus bishop with heavy pieces on the board) ...". Apparently, he assumes that the material imbalance expressed in the parentheses generally constitutes an advantage. As further evidence for the leanings of stronger players, the statistical analyses I have done (see below) shows that the side choosing ♖+♘ consistently out-rates the side with ♖+♙. It does so by only about 20-30 points in general, but by 60 points when considering decisive results. These figures apply regardless of colour, and they are true of various databases and thousands of games, so they at least indicate a statistically significant tendency by stronger players to go in for the ♖+♘ combination more often than for ♖+♙, presumably having some prejudice for the former.

The interesting thing is how little discussion and how few good examples there are to illustrate this alleged advantage of the queen and knight pairing. In Shirov's game, for example, his king was safer than Ivanchuk's and he had an outside passed pawn whereas his opponent had immobile doubled pawns. The game was drawn anyway. And Silman's comment above came in this position, where the ♖+♙ side had a classically lost game:



Aside from White's weak and doubled pawns, his bishop is about as bad as it gets.

In fact, it seems hard to come up with good illustrative positions for the ♖+♘, at least ones that are fairly neutral in their starting point. Steve Mayer, to his credit, devotes a whole chapter of his book to this debate, giving examples favourable to both sides. However, to demonstrate the superiority of queen and knight, he adduces only the following examples:

- a) a locked position in which the bishop is simply bad;
- b) a position where the minute this imbalance arises, the side with the bishop is already subject to a decisive king-hunt;
- c) a position in which the bishop is completely hemmed in, and there are numerous kingside weaknesses in addition;
- d) a position with a bad bishop, exposed king, and four isolated pawns; and finally,
- e) a position with four pawns apiece on the same side of the board. This is the fairest example, except that the side with the bishop has one very weak pawn which inevitably falls.

In other words, the side with the queen and knight had major pre-existing advantages in

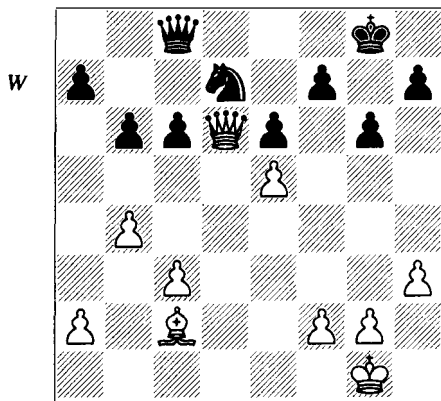
every case. Mayer then shows the other side of the coin with three positions in which the bishop is dominant (all of them with equally biased starting points). He concludes his examination with this 'Verdict': "Capablanca's intuitive insight into the advantage of queen and knight vs queen and bishop in the ending is correct." But his own examples don't seem to support such a conclusion.

My own view, just from looking at a lot of examples, is as follows:

a) an unusually large proportion of ♖+♘ vs ♗+♙ games are drawn;

b) most games which are won by either side, as in the examples mentioned above, are characterized by that side having one or more rather obvious other advantages.

In general, ♖+♘ vs ♗+♙ positions are very volatile, and often the winning side is simply the one who starts out by being able to win material or launch an attack on the opposing king. Not surprisingly, the knight tends to win in closed positions against a bad bishop, or if the opposing king is exposed, for example. Having all the pawns on one side of the board also favours the knight, of course, but it takes something else like a very poor enemy pawn structure for this to be enough to win. And just as predictably, the bishop tends to win when there are pawns on both sides of the board, and particularly if the knight has no natural outposts. But here, too, having the bishop alone is not enough to win the game without some extra advantages. Pachman, for example, gives these two examples:



Mohrlock – Gerusel

Note that aside from having pawns on both sides of the board, White's queen position is much better, and Black's knight is already restricted. That's enough for a pretty easy win. Here's the game, with Pachman's analysis:

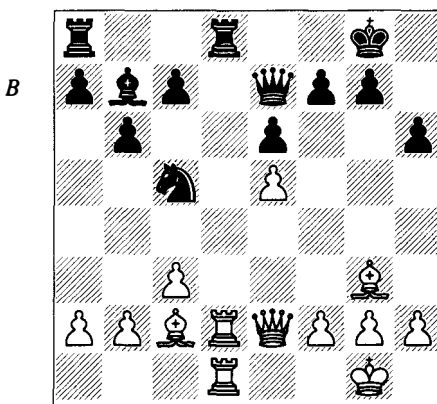
1 ♖e4 ♘b8

Or 1...c5 2 ♖c6 and then 2...♘f8 3 bxc5 bxc5 4 a4! c4 5 f4 with the idea ♗c5 and ♗xc4; or 2...♘b8 3 b5.

2 c4 a6 3 g3 ♘g7 4 ♘g2 ♘g8 5 h4 b5 6 cxb5 axb5 7 a3 ♗f8 8 ♗c7 ♗e8 9 ♖f3 h5

9...h6 10 h5 g5 11 ♖e4 and f4.

10 ♖e4 ♘g7 11 ♗f3 ♗h8 12 ♗e3 ♘g7 13 ♗f4 ♗h6 14 ♗d6 ♘g7 15 ♗e3 ♘g8 16 f3! ♘g7 17 ♗f4 ♗h7 18 g4 hxg4 19 fxg4 ♗h6 20 ♖f3 ♘g7 21 h5 gxh5 22 gxh5 ♗h6 23 ♘g3 ♘g7 24 ♘g4 f5+ 25 exf6+ ♗xf6 26 ♗f4+ ♗e7 27 ♗g5+ ♗d6 28 ♗c5+ ♗c7 29 h6 e5 30 ♗a7+ ♗d6 31 ♗g7 ♗e6+ 32 ♘g3 ♗f5 33 h7 ♗f4+ 34 ♘g2 ♗d2+ 35 ♗h3 ♗e3 36 ♗f6+ 1-0



Pachman – Fichtl

Prague 1951

This is a bit more interesting, because after 18...♗xd2 19 ♗xd2! ♖e4 20 b4 ♖xc2 21 ♗xc2, Black has achieved a knight vs bad bishop situation. But two rooks are still on the board, and the knight has nowhere good to go, e.g., 21...♘d7 22 ♗e4! and then 22...♗d8 23 ♗d4 or 22...♗e8 23 ♗b7. Best would be 22...♗b8! 23 ♗d4 ♘f8 24 f3, when Pachman rightly gives White the advantage, but it's a fight.

Instead, the game went 21...♘b7 22 ♗a4 ♗d8 (to stop ♗d7) 23 ♗xd8+ ♗xd8 24 h3, and Black decided not to try to defend the a-pawn in

view of lines like 24...a5 25 ♖c6 ♗c8 26 f4 ♟f8 27 ♟h4 ♞d8 28 ♖b5 axb4 29 cxb4, when Black would be totally tied down as well as having to worry about the potentially passed a-pawn. Play continued 24...♟h7 25 ♖xa7 ♗d5 26 c4 ♖c6 27 b5 ♖e4 28 f3 ♗d4+ 29 ♟f2! ♖a1+ 30 ♟h2 ♞a5 31 ♖xc7 ♖xa2 32 ♟xb6 ♞xc4 33 ♟d4 ♖e2 34 b6 ♞d2 35 ♖c3 g6 36 b7 ♞f1+ 37 ♟g1 ♞g3 38 b8♖ ♗d1+ 39 ♟f2 ♞h1+ 40 ♟e3 1-0.

What, if any, conclusions can we draw? The natural thing to do is conduct some statistical searches. I have done so on several huge databases. The first interesting point is that the winning percentages are almost the same regardless of colour, favouring White by only about 2%. In other words, by the time ♖+♞ vs ♖+♟ arises, White's residual advantage has almost disappeared. The second point is that there are a lot of draws: almost exactly 50% of the games, as opposed to the 30% drawing rate for all games today. In half the positions, it seems, neither side has a significant enough advantage to convert.

With these factors in mind, let's see what the figures say. In straight-up endings with ♖+♞ vs ♖+♟, the side with the knight indeed scores over 50%, but only 53.5% overall, which hardly indicates a major advantage. Colours have almost no effect on this case.

Now let's add a rook for both sides (i.e., ♖+♞+♖ vs ♖+♟+♖). That results in a virtual toss-up, although now colours again come into play. When the side with knight has White, he scores 52% overall, and when the side with the bishop has White, he scores 53%. Add another rook to both sides (♖+♞+2♖ vs ♖+♟+2♖), and when the side with the knight has White, he scores 53%, but when White has the bishop, he scores 55%.

The obvious conclusion that one might draw from these figures is that ♖+♞ seems to have a rather small edge vs ♖+♟ in the ending, but no advantage (or even a small disadvantage) when you add 1 or 2 rooks. But I should warn that a pure statistical look may say as much about practical play as it does about theoretical superiority. One proviso I have already noted above is that the side with the queen and knight (in the

pure ♖+♞ vs ♖+♟ case) tended to be a bit stronger, for whatever reason. That alone might account for the small statistical edge for the ♖+♞. Moreover, as explained in the Introduction to this book, a perception of the superiority of queen and knight may well lead players who are in already advantageous but complex positions to convert them into what they view as a safer ♖+♞ vs ♖+♟ advantage. This would skew the percentages in favour of the ♖+♞.

Also revealing is a look at the types of positions that are leading to wins, whether for the side with the knight or with the bishop. I described these in general terms above, but there is another important phenomenon which a hands-on investigation reveals: a significant percentage of these games are decided by a blunder by one side or the other. This reflects both the volatile nature of the imbalance and the influence of time pressure (many of these endings first arise between moves 30 and 40!). The reader can only verify this theory for himself, but my impression is that at least some of the 3% of games by which the ♖+♞ leads the ♖+♟ might be due to the fact that knights create more tactical threats in time-trouble than bishops! If that's true, there may be a *practical* reason to (very slightly) prefer the ♖+♞ in such endings, but no theoretical advantage whatsoever. When this and the considerations in the last paragraph are taken into account, the idea of the advantage of queen and knight over queen and bishop seems to be one of those folkloric bits of wisdom/mythology of at most extremely limited validity, and, quite possibly, of none whatsoever.

This chapter has presented a broad overview of traditional ideas about the minor pieces. Its main purpose has been to provide a backdrop against which the unconventional discoveries of Part 2 may be set. Of course, although I probably devote more attention in this book to minor-piece subjects than anything else, it is still impossible to do justice to them all. My compromise solution has been to emphasize the areas which have changed through the years. For an in-depth discussion of those changes, I refer the reader to Part 2, Chapters 4-8.

7 Those Radical Rooks

Rooks are seldom accorded special treatment in our instructional books. Usually, these works devote their attention to the value of taking over open files and getting to the seventh rank, which indeed are the most effective things we can do with rooks under normal circumstances. In this chapter, I want to expand this discussion to rook play along the other ranks. This is a rather neglected topic, one which fits in with our notion of conceptual evolution, as opposed to fundamental theoretical change. At the end of the chapter, I take a statistical look at the infamous drawishness of rook and pawn endings. I should also direct the reader's attention to two significant rook topics which are left for Part 2. The sacrifice of the exchange has its own chapter there, and Nimzowitsch's 'mysterious rook move' is incorporated into the discussion of prophylaxis.

Seventh and Eighth Ranks

In keeping with our intention to consult Nimzowitsch on most issues, we should start with his words on the seventh and eighth ranks. Surprisingly, he has been credited with being the first to explicitly identify the seventh-rank rook as an element of strategy, although naturally his contemporaries were well aware of the power of such a rook. According to Nimzowitsch, "the entry into enemy territory, in other words into the seventh and eighth ranks, forms the logical consequence of play in a file". He adds that "in the normal course of events, it will only be late, when we pass into the endgame stage, that the seventh rank will be seized ... and this despite the fact that numerous games are decided by operations in these ranks in the middle game." This certainly corresponds with our modern experience; middlegame attacks based upon the seventh rank definitely occur, but they are far outnumbered by that use of rooks in the endgame. Nimzowitsch goes on to define five 'special cases' of the seventh rank, including a seventh-rank rook escorting in passed pawns,

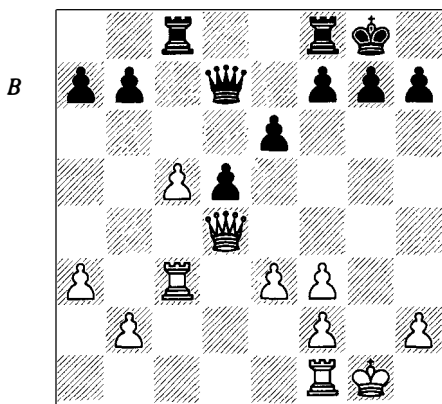
seventh-rank rooks 'marauding' to capture pawns, and 'combined play' on the seventh and eighth ranks (whereby mate threats are used to garner more material). To this day, the examples he unearthed and constructed are still used in our books. We know from experience that a rook on the seventh rank is typically worth at least a pawn in the endgame, whereas rooks doubled on the seventh rank will often win outright or, as Nimzowitsch himself pointed out, force a draw by perpetual check in an otherwise hopeless position. Because of the overexposure of this topic, I won't try to add anything to it here.

Rooks Who Roam on Ranks

But what about the other ranks? I think a strong case can be made that modern chess-players are more apt to embark upon rook adventures than their predecessors, although this still doesn't constitute a major part of the game. The reader may already be aware that rooks are often used on the second rank for defensive purposes. For example, in openings with kingside fianchettoes like the King's Indian or the Sicilian Dragon, an attack by h4-h5-hxg6 can often be met by ...fxg6, when the move ...♖f7 will then neutralize many attacks by defending h7 and g7. I don't feel the need to expand upon that case, since it is fairly self-explanatory. Instead, what I want to examine here are rooks which roam beyond the second rank. Since rooks on advanced ranks tend to be rather awkwardly placed and exposed to attack, this is a subject which doesn't get much attention, but strong players throughout the years have used rook-lifts to shift the balance of games in their favour. Let's look at some examples.

The third rank tends to be used for attacking purposes. This is an accepted and fairly normal part of the game, so I'll just show a few positions which illustrate the technique.

To begin with, here's an exclusively tactical example:



Marshall – Stoltz
Warsaw 1935

Euwe and Kramer point out that White has a queenside majority and even some prospects on the g-file. But it's Black to move:

20...e5! 21 ♖xe5 ♜c6

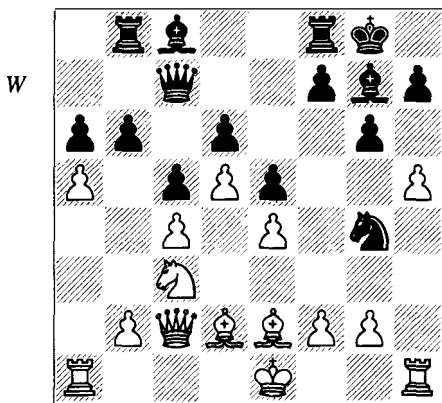
Suddenly the white king is in mortal danger. Now 22 ♖h1 fails to 22...♜h3 23 ♜g1 ♜xf3+, so White tries to defend along the third rank, but to no avail.

22 e4! d4!

Rather than 22...♜h3? 23 f4!, when White is defending.

23 ♜d3 ♜h3 24 ♜xd4 ♜g6+

Black wins the queen.



Hort – Panno

Interzonal tournament, Manila 1976

17 ♜a3!

Flesch comments: "A brilliant strategic conception! One of the rooks has developed without

a move [via the earlier h4-h5 – JW]. The other rook reaches the kingside battlefront in just two moves."

17...♜f6 18 axb6 ♜xb6 19 ♜d1! ♜b8 20 ♜g3 ♜d7 21 ♜c3 ♜b7 22 ♜e3 ♜d8 23 ♜f3 ♜e8 24 ♜f5! ♜f8

After 24...♜xf5 25 exf5 e4 26 ♜e2 e3 27 hxg6 exf2+, 28 ♜f1! 'wins', according to Janos Flesch, although Black might employ some second-rank defence of his own by means of 28...hxg6 29 fxg6 ♜e4 30 ♜gh3 fxg6!?, for example, 31 ♜xg7 ♜xg7! 32 ♜h7+ ♜f6 33 ♜xb7 ♜g3+, which is not so clear.

25 ♜c1 a5 26 ♜h6+ ♜xh6 27 ♜xh6 ♜e7 28 ♜e3 a4 29 ♜d1 ♜eb8 30 0-0!

This prepares f4. The h-file has served its purpose.

30...♜xb2!?

Trying to eliminate the dark-squared bishop, in view of lines like 30...♜f8 31 f4 exf4 32 ♜xf4 ♜xe4 33 hxg6!, etc.

31 ♜xb2 ♜xb2

Now, rather than 32 ♜g5 as played in the game, Flesch notes that 32 hxg6 fxg6 33 f4! was easily winning.

Here is an example of the third-rank rook-lift in the context of an ultra-modern game:

Speelman – Miles

British Ch, Morecambe 1975

1 c4 b6 2 d4 e6 3 e4 ♜b7 4 ♜c3 ♜b4 5 ♜c2 ♜xc3+!?

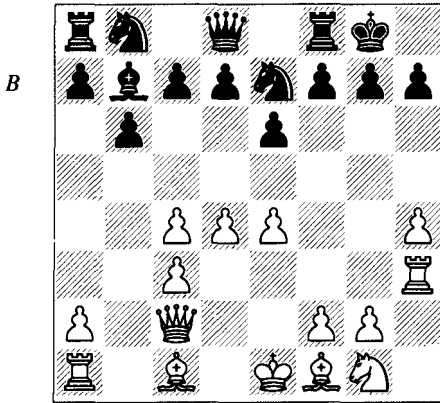
Modern openings tend to contain modern concepts. Notice how Black develops both bishops before his knights, for example, thumbing his nose at the old 'knights before bishops' rule; and here 5...♜h4!, developing the queen before any other pieces, would be not only anti-dogmatic but, as theory has shown, correct. Miles's move is less accurate, but also playable.

6 bxc3 ♜e7

Speelman comments: "This is where the fun starts. I liked my centre and bishops but got nervous about ...f5, so:"

7 h4!?! 0-0 8 ♜h3! (D)

"Once loosed from the fetters of playing 'properly', I carried out the moves I wanted to!" (Speelman). It is quite odd to bring a rook to the third rank before any of the minor pieces are



developed! One point in favour of this idea is that the rook is thereby removed from the h1-a8 diagonal, along which it might be a target after ...f5.

8...d6 9 ♖d3 e5 10 f4 f5 11 exf5 exd4 12 cxd4!?

Later, Speelman decided that 12 h5! was a good idea. I will not append most of his copious notes for this game. It's fun to just play over, noticing of course how in the end, the h3-rook proves decisive!

12...♟bc6 13 ♜c3 d5! 14 ♟f3 ♟xf5 15 g4 ♜e8+ 16 ♟d1 ♟d6 17 cxd5 ♟e7 18 ♜c2 ♟h8?!

Speelman suggests either the tame 18...h6 or 18...♟xd5! 19 ♖xh7+ ♟h8 with excellent counterattacking prospects. It turns out that the king on h8 is subject to abuse down the long dark-squared diagonal.

19 ♟e5 ♟f7!? 20 h5 ♟xe5 21 dxe5 ♜d7 22 e6! ♜xd5 23 h6 ♜f6

Here Speelman gives a page and a half of detailed analysis on 23...♜xe6, with White ultimately winning after complex and beautiful variations.

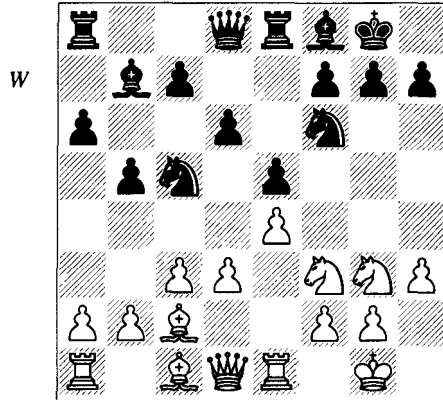
24 ♖b2 ♜xf4?

Another stunning page and a half devoted to 24...♜xe6!, although White seems ultimately to win in that case as well. I mention these typical Speelman analyses because they are both typical of his deranged perfectionism and wonderful fun to play over! Fortunately, both for Jon's sanity and for us, the rest of the game is actually comprehensible on a fairly superficial level.

25 ♟c1! ♟g6 26 ♜c3! ♜c6 27 ♜xc6 ♖xc6 28 hxg7+ ♟g8 29 ♖xg6 ♜f1+ 30 ♟c2 ♜f2+ 31 ♟b3 ♜xb2+ 32 ♟xb2 hxg6 33 ♜f1 ♟xg7 34

♜f7+ ♟g8 35 ♜hh7 ♜e8 36 ♜fg7+ ♟f8 37 e7+ 1-0

Sometimes the same third rank is used for defensive purposes. Soltis points out this interesting case of Spassky's dual use of the same defensive-rook idea:



Tal – Spassky

Candidates match (game 11), Tbilisi 1965

This was the second time Spassky had reached this fairly nondescript position as Black.

15 b4?!

In Medina Garcia-Spassky, Interzonal tournament, Gothenburg 1955, White played 15 ♟h2?! d5 16 ♜f3 g6 17 ♖g5 ♟e7 18 h4, and here Spassky used the third-rank defence idea to good effect: 18...a5! 19 h5 ♜a6! with an excellent game. White had no more attacking chances and eventually lost. The text-move is too loosening; perhaps just 15 ♖g5 was best.

15...♟cd7 16 ♖b3 a5 17 a3 axb4 18 cxb4 h6 19 ♟f5

Introducing a classic case of kingside attack versus central expansion.

19...d5! 20 ♟3h4 c5! 21 ♜e3 c4 22 ♜g3

This looks scary, especially when your opponent is Tal! But in three more moves, it becomes obvious that White lacks the firepower to break down Black's defences.

22...♟h7! 23 ♖c2 d4 24 ♜f3 ♜a6!

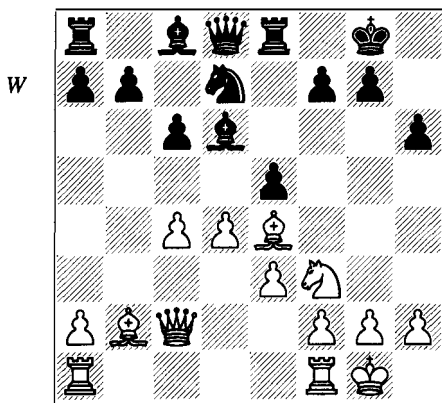
The key move, as against Medina. Now Tal throws the house at Black, but again, the third-rank rook is too effective:

25 ♟xh6 gxh6 26 ♟f5 ♜a8 27 ♟xh6 ♖xh6 28 ♜f5+ ♟h8 29 ♖xh6 ♜g8 30 ♖g5 ♜e8 31 f4

♠h7 32 ♠h4 ♠xg3 33 ♠xg3 ♠f6 34 ♠g4 ♠g6
35 ♠h4 exf4 36 ♠xf4 f6 37 ♠f2 cxd3 38 ♠xd3
♠e5 39 ♠f1 ♠g5 40 ♠h1 ♠xe4 41 ♠c1 ♠xf2+
0-1

Finally, an example from modern theory. For years, White had an easy solution to the Budapest Gambit main line, i.e., 1 d4 ♠f6 2 c4 e5 3 dxe5 ♠g4 4 ♠f3 ♠c5 5 e3 ♠c6 6 ♠c3 0-0 7 ♠e2 ♠e8 8 0-0 ♠cxe5 9 ♠xe5 ♠xe5 10 b3 with a small but seemingly ultra-safe positional edge. Then Black discovered the pragmatic 10...a5! 11 ♠b2 ♠a6, and the rook swings over to the kingside to create threats, e.g., 12 ♠a4 ♠f8 13 f4 ♠d6 14 ♠c2 ♠c6 15 ♠f3 ♠h6 16 ♠d1 d6 17 ♠c3 ♠h4 18 h3 ♠g6 with a serious attack, Zsu.Polgar-de la Villa, New York 1989.

Such third-rank transfers might not look that odd, but on the fourth rank, a rook certainly appears awkward and subject to attack. Nevertheless, rooks on the fourth rank can be very effective in probing the enemy position, and this idea finds increasing application in modern opening theory. Normally, when rooks are transferred via the fourth rank it is for attacking purposes, but they can also serve positional functions. Let's begin with a case of sustained attack:



Petrosian – Taimanov
USSR Ch, Moscow 1955

In this rather innocent-looking position, Petrosian decides upon a very aggressive plan:

14 ♠ad1! exd4 15 ♠h7+! ♠h8 16 ♠xd4

The point; this is one of those cases in which a fourth-rank rook wreaks havoc both in the

centre and on the kingside. Notice that 15 ♠xd4 would have been met by 15...♠f6!, whereas now 16...♠f6?? 17 c5 ♠xh7 18 ♠xd6 followed by 19 ♠xh6 wins.

16...♠c5

Alternatives include 16...♠e7? 17 ♠e5 and 16...♠e7 17 ♠fd1 ♠c7 18 ♠e4! ♠d8 19 ♠g4 f6 20 ♠f5 ♠e7 21 ♠h4, winning.

17 ♠f4 ♠e7 18 ♠e4! ♠f8 19 ♠h4!

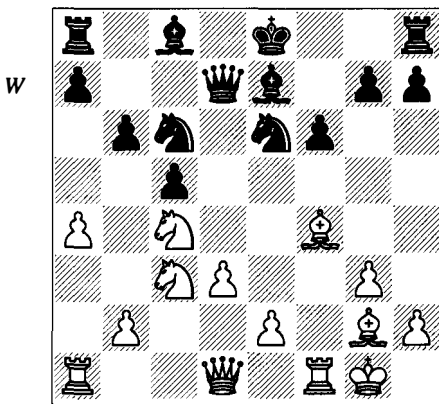
Attacking h6, and 19...♠f6? 20 ♠xh6! won't help.

19...f6 20 ♠g6 ♠e7 21 ♠h5!

The last of a series of fine rook moves. Now the light squares are fatally weak, and ♠h4 will follow.

21...♠d6 22 ♠d1 ♠e5 23 ♠a3 c5 24 ♠h4! 1-0

There might follow 24...♠d8 (24...♠g8 25 ♠h7! ♠xh7 26 ♠g6+) 25 ♠e4 ♠g8 26 ♠d5+.



Polugaevsky – Gheorghiu
Palma de Mallorca 1972

White has a lead in development, but a rather suspect central pawn formation. He decides to give up the bishop-pair in order to accentuate his developmental advantage and bring a rook into play:

14 a5! ♠xf4 15 ♠xf4

A case of direct attack, since b6 is threatened, as is ♠e4+ in some lines. This means that Black's king will be stuck in the centre. In similar games with the same opening, Black achieved ...0-0, but the rook on f4 was able to probe Black's kingside effectively by ♠h4.

15...♠b8 16 axb6 axb6 17 ♠d5 ♠d8 18 ♠e4+! ♠f7 19 ♠b3 ♠d4 20 ♠xd4!

Now the rook is cashed in for Black's best defensive piece.

20...cxd4 21 ♖b4?!

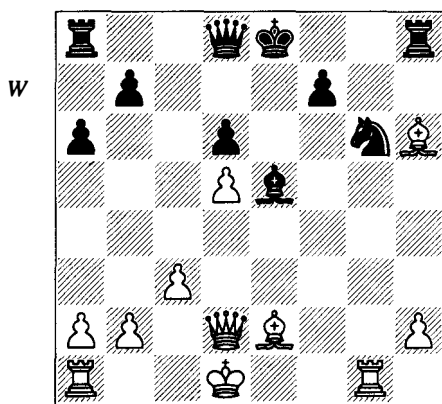
Mayer points out the immediate win by 21 ♖h3!, but the text-move still leaves White with enough attack to win.

21...♗g6 22 ♖c6 ♗c7 23 ♖xb8 ♗xb8 24 ♗b5 ♗c7 25 ♗d5!

White has a killing position. The details aren't important for our purposes.

25...♞e8 26 ♖d6 ♞e5 27 ♖e4+ ♗h5 28 ♗g8! f5 29 ♖f7 fxe4 30 ♗xh7+ ♗g4 31 ♞f1 ♞f5 32 ♗g6+ ♞g5 33 ♗xe4+ ♗h5 34 ♗h7+ ♗g4 35 ♗h4# (1-0)

Such rook-lifts can also be used for defensive and prophylactic purposes. Here are two brilliant examples:



Karpov – Hort

Alekhine Memorial, Moscow 1971

Black threatens ...♗h4, and Karpov gives 22 ♖g5 ♗b6 23 ♖e3 ♗c7, when h2 is attacked and ...0-0-0 may follow. Instead, White finds a creative way to use his rook:

22 ♞g4! ♗f6

White's last move not only guards h4 and contemplates ♞b4, but it also prepares for the pawn thrust h4. On 22...♖xh2 23 ♖c2 ♖e5, Dvoretsky suggests the beautiful prophylactic move 24 ♞g5!!, threatening ♞h1 or ♞h5, and preventing 24...♗f6? due to 25 ♖g7.

23 h4! ♗f5 24 ♞b4!

OK, Black has prevented White's ♖c2, but he can't connect his own rooks either because 24...0-0-0? loses to 25 ♖g4. And after 24...♞g8,

25 ♖d3 ♗f3+ 26 ♖c2 activates the queen's rook.

24...♖f6 25 h5 ♖e7

Not 25...♖e5? 26 ♞f4; but now what should White do?

26 ♞f4! ♗e5 27 ♞f3!

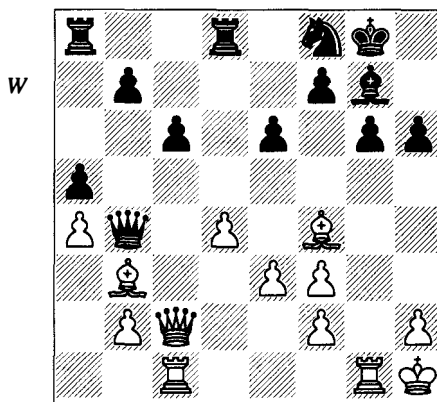
Incredible. This rook is a monster! Now 28 ♖f4 is threatened, and 27...0-0-0 28 ♖f4 ♗xd5 29 ♞d3 ♗h1+ 30 ♖c2! ♗xa1 31 ♖g4+ ♗b8 32 ♞xd6 ♞xd6 33 ♗xd6+ followed by 34 ♗xf6 wins for White. So Black tries the other capture:

27...♖xd5 28 ♞d3 ♞xh6 29 ♞xd5! ♗e4 30 ♞d3!

Seven of White's last nine moves have been with this rook, and the other two by a flank pawn – all with White's king stuck in the centre! And yet White is threatening ♗xh6 as well as ♞e3, and now wins by force:

30...♗h1+ 31 ♖c2 ♗xa1 32 ♗xh6 ♖e5 33 ♗g5 1-0

Black lost on time, but there was no hope. The sort of game which leaves your mouth hanging open.



Yusupov – Gavrikov

Horgen 1994

Black is threatening the liberating ...c5, but White is ready for that and plays the prophylactic idea...

22 ♞g4! ♞ac8

White's point is seen after 22...c5 23 ♖c7, threatening dxc5.

23 ♖g3 ♗b6

Yusupov had intended to dance with the rook after 23...h5 24 ♞e4! with the idea 24...c5 25

d5! c4 26 ♖xc4 ♖xc4 27 ♗xc4 ♗xc4 28 ♕xc4 and White has a small advantage.

24 h4 h5 25 ♖g5 ♕f6

Again, White is ready for 25...c5 26 ♖xc5 ♖xc5 27 dxc5 ♗b4 28 ♗c4, e.g., 28...♗xc4 29 ♖xc4 ♕xb2 30 c6 bxc6 31 ♖xc6.

26 ♖c5 ♕e7? 27 ♖xh5!!

The rook has had purely prophylactic effect thus far, but now switches to attack. Best now was 27...c5, but Yusupov's analysis demonstrates a clear edge for White after 28 ♕e5!. The rest of the attack is very pretty, although not relevant to our theme:

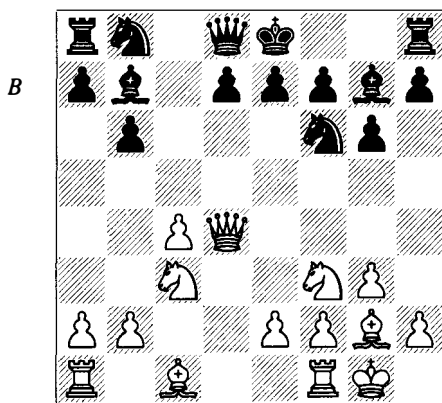
27...gxh5? 28 ♖g1 ♖g6 29 ♕xe6! ♖h7 30 ♗f5 ♖g8 31 ♕e5 ♖h6 32 ♕f4+ ♖h7 33 ♗xh5+ ♖g7 34 ♕h6+ 1-0

When researching for this section, I was surprised to find a glut of relevant material. In several modern openings, rook-lifts are used routinely to achieve positional and attacking purposes. Consider the idea of ...♖c5 in this variation:

Karpov – Kasparov

*World Ch match (game 23),
London/Leningrad 1986*

1 ♖f3 ♖f6 2 c4 b6 3 g3 c5 4 ♕g2 ♕b7 5 0-0 g6 6 d4 cxd4 7 ♗xd4 ♕g7 8 ♖c3 (D)



8...d6

Another good example of the ...♖c5 idea occurs after 8...♖c6 9 ♗f4 ♖c8 10 ♖d1 0-0 11 ♗h4 ♖a5 12 b3 ♖c5! (this prevents 13 ♕h6 due to 13...♖h5) 13 ♕a3 ♖f5! (intending 14 g4 ♖f4) with dynamic equality, which occurred in

Helmers-Plaskett, Gausdal 1982 and other games.

9 ♖d1 ♖bd7 10 b3 ♖c8 11 ♕b2 0-0 12 ♗e3 ♖e8 13 ♖ac1 a6 14 ♕a1 ♖c5! 15 a4 ♗a8 16 ♖e1 ♖f5!

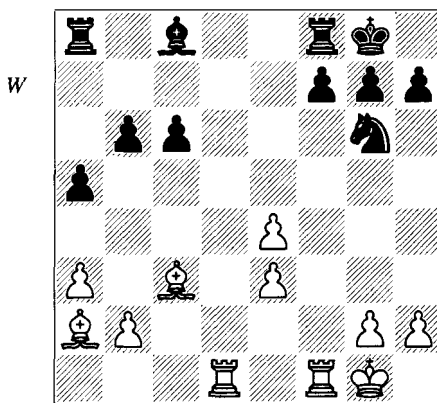
Threatening ...♖g4 and forcing the minor weakness f3, after which the rook can consider its work well done.

17 ♕xb7 ♗xb7 18 f3 h5 19 ♖g2 ♖c5 20 ♕b2 ♖cc8 21 ♕a3 ♖c5 22 ♖b1 ♖e6

The game is equal.

The frequency of the idea ...♖c8-c5 has led to the comical situation that White actually engages in his own prophylaxis to prevent it! Consider (from the diagram) the game Kramnik-Karpov, Amber blindfold, Monaco 1994: 8...d6 9 ♕e3!? (already thinking about ...♖c5) 9...♖bd7 10 ♖ac1 ♖c8 11 ♖fd1 0-0 12 ♗h4 ♖e8 13 b3 a6 14 ♕h3 ♖c7 15 ♕h6 ♖c5 (anyway! But this is not quite as pointed here) 16 ♕xg7 ♖xg7 17 ♗d4! ♖g8 18 b4 ♖c7 19 ♖d5 ♖xd5 20 cxd5, and White had some advantage. 9 ♕e3 is currently White's favourite approach in this position.

Naturally, rooks are transferred along other ranks as well, but it's difficult to make systematic comments about those situations. The sixth-rank rook often attacks weak pawns in a way similar to the seventh-rank rook.



Botvinnik – Euwe

World Ch match-tournament, Moscow 1948

White is clearly better, but his technique is worth noting:

24 ♖d6!

Going where the pawns are.

24...♖a6 25 ♜f2 ♖b5 26 e5

This intends 27 e6 fxe6 28 ♜d7!.

26...♟e7 27 e4!

Restricting the knight; now Black has to stop ♜d7, which explains his next move.

27...c5 28 e6!

Better than 28 ♜xb6 ♖c6 29 e6 ♖xe4 30 exf7+ ♟h8 31 ♜e2 ♖d5.

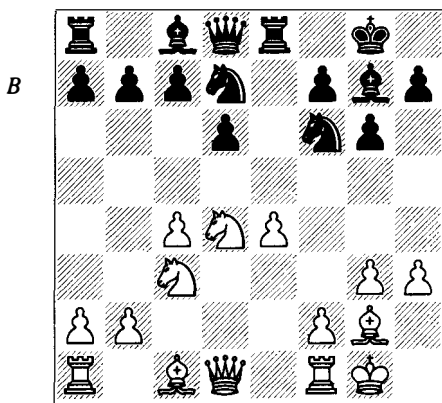
28...f6

28...fxe6 29 ♜xe6 ♜xf2 30 ♟xf2 ♟f8 loses to 31 ♖xg7+ ♟xg7 32 ♜xe7+ ♟h8 33 ♜b7.

29 ♜xb6 ♖c6 30 ♜xc6! ♟xc6 31 e7+ ♜f7 32 ♖d5 1-0

Since 32...♜c8 33 e8♜+ ♜xe8 34 ♖xc6 and 35 ♖d5 wins a piece. The sixth-rank rook operated very much like one on the seventh rank, even in its eventual sacrifice.

In concluding this section, I should point out that the value of such rook-lifts is not based upon general principles, but upon the concrete factors of each individual position. For example, in the main line of the g3 variation of the King's Indian Defence, 1 d4 ♟f6 2 c4 d6 3 ♟c3 g6 4 g3 ♖g7 5 ♟f3 0-0 6 ♖g2 ♟bd7 7 0-0 e5 8 e4 exd4 9 ♟xd4 ♜e8 10 h3 (D), Black has tried out a number of ideas involving ...♜e5-h5, to try to force weaknesses in White's kingside.



After a few years of attempts, however, this idea has virtually disappeared, because White's extra moves on the kingside ended up being useful ones, and the rook tended to look a bit stupid, e.g., 10...a6 (or 10...♟c5 11 ♜e1 ♖d7 12 b3 ♜c8?! 13 ♟h2 ♜e5?! 14 f4 ♜h5 15 f5!, which turned out clearly to White's advantage

in Vul-Dochev, Russia 1993) 11 ♖e3 ♜b8 12 a4 ♟c5 13 ♜c2 a5 14 ♜ad1 ♖d7 15 ♜fe1 ♜c8 16 ♟h2 ♜e5!? 17 f3 ♜h5 18 h4 h6 19 ♟g1! ♜e5 (the rook has no more point on h5) 20 ♟de2 b6 21 ♖d4 with a modest but definite advantage, Itkis-Borge, Erevan Olympiad 1996. In modern chess, the efficacy of such ideas is ultimately decided by the rigorous tests of practice. One might contrast this with the famous game Tarrasch-Lasker, World Chmatch (game 4), Dusseldorf 1908, in which Lasker played ...♜e5-c5 at one point, seemingly dooming his rook to extinction but achieving a brilliant counterattack in the process. For many years, this game was uncritically reproduced to illustrate Lasker's great genius (which indeed it does); but as Dvoretsky has shown, Tarrasch only had to play slightly better to retain a large advantage, and not just at one point, but even after having made mistakes. I don't believe that Lasker's risk-taking style, at least in the precise form it was applied in this game, would fare very well today. On the other hand, rook-lifts to the fourth rank are sometimes perfectly sound, and seem to have gained a small but permanent place in contemporary chess.

Drawish Endings?

By legend, it was Tarrasch who first said that all rook and pawn endings are drawn. I hesitate even to comment upon this subject, because the kernel of truth in it is so clear to anyone who has ever studied ♜+♖ vs ♜ endings. There are many ways for the defender to frustrate the side with the extra pawn. Nevertheless, this is one of those folkloric 'rules', and the reader may find it interesting to see what a database search reveals. I have looked at three cases:

- rook and extra pawn versus rook (i.e., with any number of total pawns);
- rook and single extra pawn versus rook; and as a control,
- various combinations of other pieces and an extra pawn or a lone pawn versus the same combination of pieces (e.g., simple things like ♖+♖ vs ♖ to complex ones like ♜, ♖, 2♟+4♖ vs ♜, ♖, 2♟+3♖).

Unfortunately, there is no way to be 'fair' about the way that these endings are chosen. But right off, it is interesting to look at case 'a'

when its conditions are only required to last for one ply (half a move) versus that case when its conditions last for at least 10 ply (5 full moves). Since there is a slight (2%) difference in the results depending upon which colour has the extra pawn (i.e., White retains a tiny residual advantage), I will give only the results with White having the material advantage. The side with the rook and extra pawn wins 46%, draws 44%, and loses 10% of the time when only required to be on the board for 1 ply, but those figures go to winning 57%, drawing 39%, and losing 4% of the time when the rook and extra pawn last for at least 10 ply. These last figures are probably of more interest to the theoretician, since they represent a more stable condition, so for all other results I have used the 10-ply criterion.

What about case 'b', with a single, extra pawn? Then the extra pawn wins 50% of the time, and draws 50% of the time, regardless of colour. This case is probably the one Tarrasch was referring to.

Finally, we have case 'c' as a control. This is supposed to include all other pawn-up endings without rooks. Interestingly, the figures parallel the basic pawn-up rook endings rather closely: the side with the extra pawn wins 59%, draws 37%, and loses 4% (again using figures for

White with the extra material; there's about a 3% residual bias for White). Certain breakdowns are also revealing: bishop and extra pawn vs bishop wins 52% of the time and draws 46%; knight and extra pawn vs knight wins 67% of the time and draws 31%; and queen and extra pawn vs queen wins 54% of the time and draws 42%. When we move on to the piece plus single pawn vs piece endings, we have the bishop drawing 55% of the time, the knight drawing 61%, and the queen drawing 53%.

What does all this mean? First of all, these kinds of searches are inherently rather loose, as one can quickly confirm by looking at the specific games which survive the filter. There are numerous fluky and unusual positions, so it's not clear how significant the numbers I've reported are. But if we can draw any tentative conclusions, it would be that having an extra pawn in a rook and pawn ending with multiple pawns is apparently no more drawish than having an extra pawn in a random non-rook ending. As for the simplest case, rook and one pawn versus rook, that draws about half the time, which is actually less drawish than other individual pieces with a lone extra pawn. So, at least compared to other analogous endings, rook endings are not particularly drawish. Another truism bites the dust?

8 Royalty in Our Times

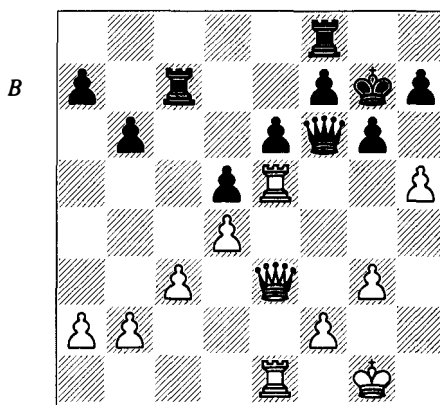
What's it like to be a king? Not much fun, at least in chess. One spends most of one's life hiding in fear, far from the fray, while even your queen gets to go out and slay the foe, bedecking herself in glory. About the only exercise you get is shuffling away, turtle-like, when the enemy forces get too close. The nineteenth-century chess king was more adventurous, to be sure, but only in a suicidal sense. After a while, Tarrasch or some other court advisor convinced such reckless monarchs to pursue a comfortable life back in the castle, and only to enter the battlefield when the queen and most of the other officers were safely dead. At that point, the king could boldly step forth for the noble purposes of tax collection, and, of course, in order to cultivate a new consort from the ranks of the peasantry.

Is the modern king any different? For the most part, no; king safety is still the primary concern in the vast majority of middlegames. But things are a little less dogmatic than in the latter-nineteenth and early-twentieth century when, as Soltis says, "Morphy and his imitators always castled quickly." For one thing, there are quite a few openings in which a king stays in the centre (see Karpov's recent treatment of the Caro-Kann Defence, for example). And ever since Nimzowitsch's time, there have been certain players who seemed to revel in finding surprising roles for the king, sometimes avoiding castling to better coordinate their forces, at other times even marching forward to support the troops. Kaidanov says of such players that they have 'a feel for the king'.

The Nimzo-Kingdian Defence

Perhaps the first player with such a feel was Nimzowitsch himself. He once said "I love to take my king for promenades", and indeed, he had that knack for recognizing positions in which the best plan available was to vacate the palace for a trip to the country villa. Keene, who collected examples of such promenades by

Nimzowitsch, categorized the motives for king walks as follows: (a) provocation; (b) pre-emptive defence (running away from a threatened wing); (c) "a portent of aggressive action on the vacated wing itself". I will apply these categories, which sometimes overlap, to the examples which follow. Let's begin with an example from the promenader himself:



Alekhine – Nimzowitsch

St Petersburg 1914

Things are not looking very promising for Black; in fact, White seems to be on the verge of complete domination. At this point, Nimzowitsch notices an interesting feature of the position: it's not so much that his kingside is weak, but rather, that his king is a target there. Thus the following moves, setting up a promenade.

27...♖d8! 28 ♔g2 ♜cc8 29 ♜h1 ♕f8! 30 ♜h4 ♕e8! 31 ♜h6 ♕e7 32 ♜f4

White can't capture the h-pawn due to ...♜h8. But what now?

32...♜h8! 33 ♜e1 ♜d7 34 ♜h1 ♜g8 35 ♜g5+ ♕d6! 36 ♜e5+ ♕c6 37 a4?!

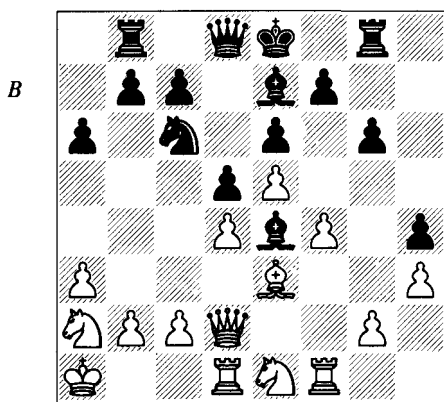
Keene criticizes this "vain attacking gesture", which eventually offers Black a queen-side target.

37...♕b7

This completes the promenade, although later Black played ...a6 and ...♕a7 as well. The

odd thing is that, once you see the king on the queenside, it looks absolutely safe and natural there. But as practical players, we are extremely disinclined to initiate such king-walks. As the game went, Alekhine badly overextended and exposed his position by playing h6 and g4-g5, after which Nimzowitsch was able to pressure the queenside and eventually break through by ...e5.

That king march was an example of case 'b', pre-emptive defence. Here's Nimzowitsch applying case 'c', the 'portent of aggressive action':



Nilsson – Nimzowitsch

Exhibition game, Eskilstuna 1921

19...♔d7! 20 ♖g1 ♕c8 21 ♜c1 b6 22 b4 a5
23 c3 axb4 24 cxb4 ♖a8 25 ♕b2 ♕b7

This threatens 26...♖xa3!.

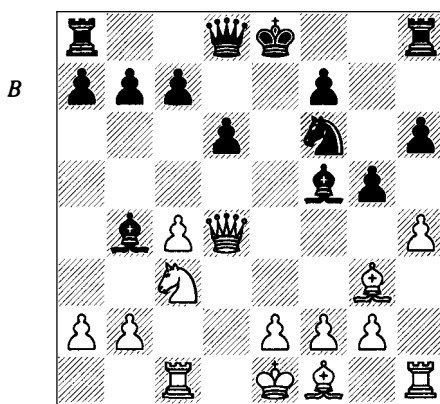
26 ♜a2 g5!

With the king away from the kingside, Black is able to attack on that side of the board and overload the white defenders. The rest is self-explanatory:

27 fxg5 ♗xg5 28 g4 hxg3 29 ♖xg3 ♗xe3 30 ♖xe3 ♜h4 31 ♜c3 ♜a7 32 ♖c1 ♜f2+ 33 ♕b3 ♜b5 34 ♜c6+ ♕b8 35 ♜xb5 ♜xe3+ 0-1

King Adventures after Nimzowitsch

In modern times, a newly-pragmatic attitude opened up surprising possibilities for king play. We begin with a well-known, but still refreshing, example:



Keres – Richter

Munich 1942

White's last move, 11 h4, threatens 12 hxg5. The natural defence is 11...g4, which is weakening, or 11...♖g8, which cedes the h-file. Instead, Richter found the shocking...

11...♔d7!!

This protects the h8-rook and by doing so, threatens the aggressive ...♜e4. But can Black get away with his king in the centre?

12 ♜d1?!

Probably not best. But the natural 12 ♗e5 runs into 12...♗c5! 13 ♗xf6 ♗xd4 14 ♗xd8 ♖axd8 with fine play. Perhaps just 12 f3 was called for.

12...♜e4 13 ♜e5 ♗xc3+ 14 bxc3 ♜xg3 15 fxg3 ♗g6

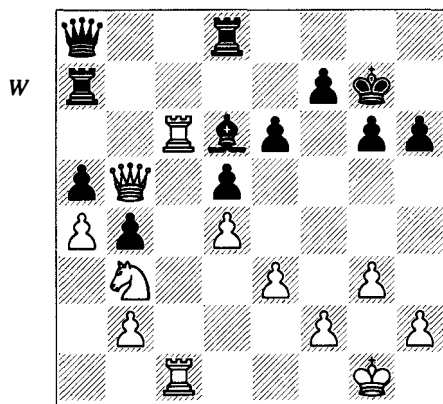
Snug and safe. White's is the position that's beginning to look funny.

16 hxg5 ♗xg5 17 ♜f4 ♖ae8 18 ♜d5 ♜xf4 19 gxf4 b6!

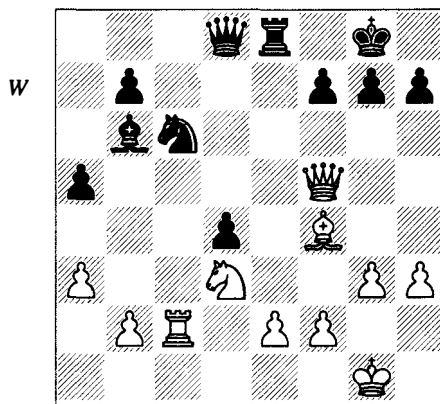
Black is clearly better (20 f5? c6). Note how well the king stands now!

The next player who became known for his king walks was the enormously imaginative Petrosian. In fact, there are too many fine examples from his play to choose from, so I'll just present a few showing how naturally he integrated the king into his play:

In the following position, White has an advantage on the queenside, but a close examination will show that there is no clear way to make progress. I wonder how many players would have found his simple solution:



Petrosian – Unzicker
Hamburg 1960



Petrosian – Peters
Lone Pine 1976

29 ♖f1! ♜g8 30 h4 h5 31 ♜1c2 ♜h7 32 ♜e1!

Now we see what White is up to. The king will travel all the way to the queenside, after which White can safely advance his kingside pawns to open a second front. Thus, we have an unambiguous example of case 'c'.

32...♜g8 33 ♜d1 ♜h7 34 ♜c1 ♜g8 35 ♜b1 ♜h7 36 ♜e2 ♜b7 37 ♜c1 ♜g7 38 ♜b5! ♜a8

A nice win follows 38...♜xb5 39 axb5 a4 40 b6 ♜ad7 41 ♜a5 ♜a8 42 ♜xd6! ♜xd6 43 b7 ♜b8 44 ♜c8 ♜d8 45 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 46 ♜c6. By playing ♜b5-e2, White gains one extra move to advance on the kingside before Black can transfer his forces there.

39 f4 ♜h7 40 ♜e2 ♜b7 41 g4! hxg4 42 ♜xg4 ♜e7 43 h5 ♜f6 44 ♜a2 ♜g7 45 hxg6 ♜xg6 46 ♜h4 ♜e7

After 46...♜h8 47 ♜f2, the threat of ♜g1 is devastating. Notice how White never actually needs to move his rooks to the kingside, ultimately winning with the same c-file advantage he's had all along.

47 ♜f2 ♜f8 48 ♜d2 ♜b7 49 ♜b3 ♜a7 50 ♜h2! ♜f6 51 ♜c8! ♜ad7 52 ♜c5! b3+ 53 ♜xb3 ♜d6 54 f5! ♜b6+ 55 ♜a2 1-0

Here's a more refined, but fundamentally similar, case 'c' example (*see following diagram*):

White has the slightest of advantages, based upon his powerful blockading knight on d3 and better bishop, although Black's space and pressure on e2 also count for something. The way in

which Petrosian makes progress is something to marvel at:

27 h4!

First, some probing for weaknesses on the kingside. But why shouldn't White be just as exposed there as Black?

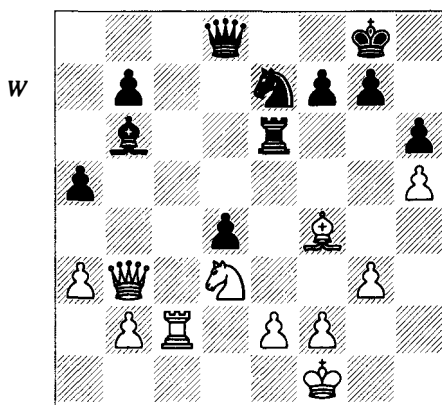
27...h6 28 ♜b5 ♜a7 29 ♜f5 ♜c6 30 ♜f1!

Protecting e2? Not really; White wants to walk his king all the way over to the queenside and engineer a break by, for instance g4-g5.

30...♜e6 31 ♜b5 ♜a7 32 ♜b3 ♜c6 33 h5!

Grabbing space, but more importantly, not allowing ...h5.

33...♜e7 (D)



34 ♜e1! ♜d5 35 ♜b5 ♜f6!

Exchanging on f4 would reduce the position to good knight vs bad bishop, with the c-file still under White's control.

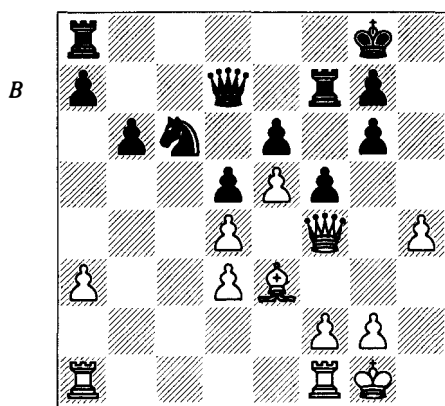
36 ♜d1! ♜d5 37 ♜e5 ♜e7 38 g4!

Presaging the g5 break, but also providing a comfortable hideaway for the bishop on g3.

38...♖c6 39 ♖g3 ♘a7 40 ♗b3 ♙c6 41 ♙c1 ♚e4! 42 f3 ♚e3 43 ♙b1 ♙e7?

Finally, after defending superbly, Black falters; he shouldn't allow the exchange of this key piece. The problem is, he's in a sort of zugzwang except for rook moves, since his queen and bishop can't move, and the king is tied to the protection of f7. Thus, a plausible line might be 42...♚e8 43 ♙b1 ♚e3 44 ♗b5 ♘a7 45 ♗f5 ♙c6 46 ♖f4 ♚e6 47 g5 hxg5 48 ♖xg5 ♗e8 49 ♗g4! with pressure and an attack. After 43...♙e7, Black could have defended better, but his position was already extremely difficult and he lost quickly:

44 ♖h4! ♗d6 45 ♖xe7 ♚xe7 46 ♚c8+ ♙h7 47 ♚f8 ♗c7 48 f4 ♖c5 49 ♗d5 ♚e5 50 ♖xf7 1-0



Diez del Corral – Petrosian

Palma de Mallorca 1969

Black has a major long-term advantage in view of his good knight vs bad bishop and the weak white d-pawns. But in the meantime, his g-pawns require protection, and White would like to attack on the kingside by g3, ♖g2, ♚h1, and h5. Once again, Petrosian finds a way to maximize the efficiency of his pieces, and at the same time remove his king from the danger zone.

19...♗e8! 20 g3 ♚c7 21 ♖g2 ♗f7 22 ♚h1 ♙f8!

It's almost too easy! The queenside is obviously safe, and White lacks the firepower to break through on the kingside (shades of Alekhine-Nimzowitsch).

23 ♗g5 ♙e8 24 ♚ac1 ♙d7 25 h5 gxh5 26 ♚xh5 ♚g8 27 ♚h7 ♙c8 28 ♗h4 ♗g6 29 ♚h8 ♚xh8 30 ♗xh8+ ♙b7

Safe! White's pieces still have some activity, but he is hampered by the fact that an exchange of queens will always lead to a won ending for Black.

31 ♗f8 ♚c8 32 ♗d6 ♗e8 33 a4 ♚d8 34 ♗a3 ♗e7 35 ♗c3 ♚c8 36 ♖d2 g5!

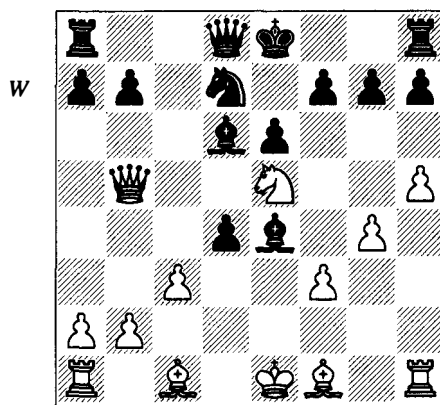
Once again, the side vacated proves available for the opening of a second front. This example is mainly case 'b', but ultimately, there's some 'c' mixed in as well!

37 ♗c2 f4! 38 gxf4 gxf4 39 ♖xf4 ♚g8+ 40 ♖g3 ♙xd4 41 ♗c3 ♙e2 42 ♗c6+ ♙b8 43 ♚e1 ♙f4+ 44 ♙f1 ♙xd3

Winning. The rest is tactical, but straightforward:

45 ♚b1 ♗f7 46 ♗d6+ ♙b7 47 ♙e2 ♚c8 48 a5 ♚c2+ 49 ♙f1 ♙xf2 50 ♚xb6+ axb6 51 ♗xb6+ ♙c8 52 ♗a6+ ♙b8 53 ♗b6+ ♗b7 54 ♗d6+ ♗c7 0-1

Perhaps it's possible to be too brilliant in this realm. When the king-march represents a type of provocation (case 'a' above), that is often the case:



Karpov – A. Zaitsev

Kuibyshev 1970

Right out of the opening, White finds himself in an awkward position in which he is apparently worse. With his next move, Karpov conceives of an amazing idea: in order to retain a material and positional balance, his king will march right up the board, in spite of all the

heavy material surrounding it. It takes nerves of steel to execute this:

15 ♖xf7!? ♕g3+ 16 ♜e2 d3+ 17 ♜e3! ♜f6!

Certainly 17...♖xf7 was also possible, when White would continue his provocation by 18 ♜xe4 (18 fxe4? ♜e5! threatening ...♜g5+) 18...♜f6+ 19 ♜e3, and on 19...♜d5+, perhaps 20 ♜e4!? again!

18 ♜xe4! ♜xf7 19 ♜h3 a6 20 ♜g5 h6 21 ♜e3

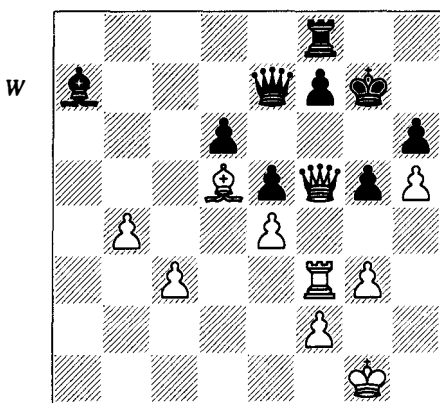
Soltis awards this absurd-looking self-blocking move an '!', and 20...h6 a '?'. Amazingly, White emerged unscathed after...

21...e5 22 ♜xd3 ♜f4 23 ♜g1 0-0-0 24 ♜c2 ♜xc1 25 ♜xc1 ♜xa2 26 ♜h2 ♜hf8 27 ♜d2 ♜a4+ 28 ♜b1 ♜c6 29 ♜d3!

...with fairly balanced prospects (White even went on to win).

There's only one problem here, which I found while preparing this example: 21...♜f6+! leads to a forced win after 22 ♜xd3 ♜xg4!, and 23 fxg4 ♜xf1+, hitting h3, or 23 ♜b6 ♜f2+. In fact, 21 ♜e3? was wrong. White should probably have bailed out with 21 ♜g6; one feels that this would have been Karpov's choice when he was a few years older!

Perhaps one needs fewer pieces on the board for a truly successful provocation. In his article on king marches, Kaidanov (who has played some nice ones himself) features this example:



Psakhis – Hebden
Chicago 1983

White's position is certainly dominant-looking; as Kaidanov points out, Black can only

move his bishop! On the other hand, how to make progress? The passed b-pawn isn't of much use when it can be blockaded so easily by the dark-squared bishop. The answer: a king promenade, of course! But where is it heading?

42 ♜g2 ♜b6 43 ♜f1 ♜a7 44 ♜e2 ♜b6 45 ♜d3 ♜a7 46 ♜c4 ♜c7+ 47 ♜b3

Nowhere?

47...♜e7 48 g4 ♜b6 49 ♜c4! ♜a7 50 ♜b5!!

Somewhere!

50...♜e8+

Remarkably, 50...♜b8+ 51 ♜a6! ♜b6+ 52 ♜a5 simply wins. Provocation with a point!

51 ♜c6 ♜d8

The position after 51...♜b8+ 52 ♜c4 ♜c7 53 ♜d7 (53 ♜f6+!? ♜h7 54 ♜d5) is similar to what happens.

52 ♜c4 ♜e7 53 ♜d7!

When the queens are traded, the king is in position to usher in his pawns. This was the underlying rationale for the king march.

53...♜e6+ 54 ♜xe6 fxe6 55 ♜xf8 ♜xf8 56 ♜b5 ♜e7 57 ♜a6 ♜xf2 58 c4 ♜d8 59 ♜b7 ♜e1 60 b5 ♜f2 61 b6

...and the ending was easily winning.

So the king gets to have a little fun, after all. Of course, exotic king marches of the type shown here will always be exceptional. Those interested in king play might also want to keep an eye on the increasing number of opening lines in which the monarch remains in the centre. Typically, this arises because one wishes to achieve a particular goal (e.g., a freeing pawn move or ideal piece development) and can't afford the tempo needed for castling. Certain structures lend themselves to this idea, e.g., black pawns on f7, e6, and either d5, as in the French, or c6, as in the Scandinavian, Caro-Kann, and Slav Defences. In all four of these openings, moves such as ...♜f8, ...♜e7, and ...♜d7 are becoming part of established theory. Of course, one will also find mainstream openings in which White forfeits castling for strategic reasons.

To sum up: modern players attend to king safety as assiduously as their predecessors did, but there seems to be a bit more room for creative king play today, a trend I would expect to continue.

9 Assorted Topics

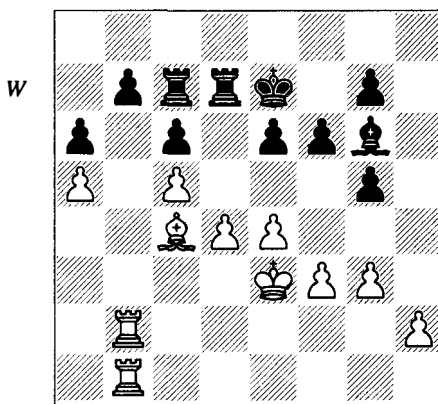
We conclude Part 1 by looking at a few topics that Nimzowitsch addressed, but which don't fit in elsewhere. Needless to say, there are areas of traditional theory which we haven't touched upon, and still others which will be examined in the next Part, but only by contrast with a considerably different modern point of view. The first two subjects which follow are characterized by their smooth transition from classical to modern play, and the last one has practically disappeared from chess theory.

Manoeuvring and Weaknesses

Nimzowitsch devotes the last chapter of *My System* to 'manoeuvring against weaknesses', a process he characterizes more as a matter of technique and patience than as a theoretical procedure. But the part of his discussion which interests me concerns the idea of "combined play on both wings, with weaknesses which, though for the moment wanting, are yet hidden". He gives a rather too complicated example of this in which, by means of zugzwang, his opponent was forced to create a second, exploitable weakness. In his own words, "play on two wings is usually based on the following idea. We engage one wing or the obvious weaknesses on it, and thus draw the other enemy wing out of its reserve, when new weaknesses will be created on that reserve wing, and so the signal is given for systematic manoeuvring against two weaknesses."

In our times, the Dvoretsky school has strongly emphasized this idea of needing to have play against two weaknesses in order to be able to win. I have heard jokes by grandmaster students of Dvoretsky about the 'four-weakness rule' and the 'no-weakness' rule and so forth, poking fun at the slightly rigid nature of such constructions. But Kosikov quotes this instructive example (D):

Shirov comments: "One weakness, the b7-pawn, has been securely fixed... But as a child I learned that for victory I will need at least one

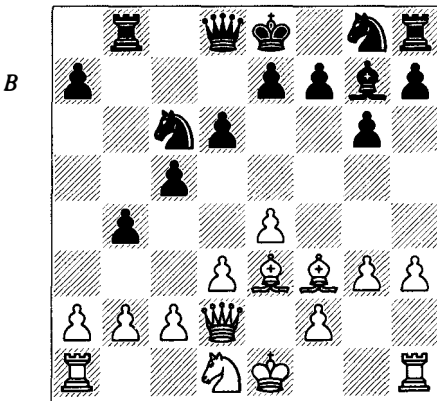


every master has given us examples of creating threats on one wing to destroy the coordination of the opponent's forces, and then switching suddenly to the other wing for a decisive breakthrough. From a theoretical point of view, the exact number of weaknesses (or targets, or available tactical themes) is really not so important.

Exchanging, Old and New

Nimzowitsch lists a number of reasons for exchanging pieces, and (to discourage what he calls 'indiscriminate bartering') he even claims that "if an exchange doesn't come under one or the other of these it is bad". Briefly, his list includes all the classical reasons for exchanging, e.g., to seize an open file, to destroy a defender, not to lose time, and to simplify if one has material superiority.

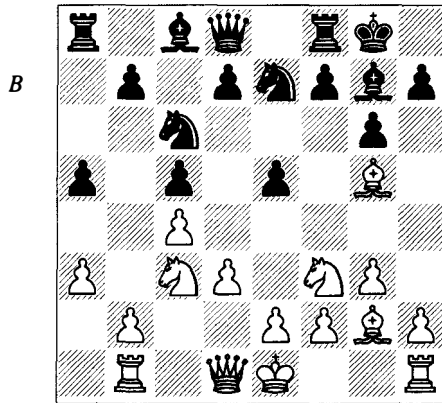
None of these reasons has grown less valid, but we might want to add some modern ideas on this subject. One such idea which seems particularly important is exchanging to establish control of colour complexes. A simple example of this would be in the Closed Sicilian after 1 e4 c5 2 ♖c3 d6 3 g3 g6 4 ♕g2 ♕g7 5 d3 ♜c6 6 ♕e3 ♞b8 7 ♞d2 b5 8 ♜f3 b4 9 ♜d1 ♕g4!? 10 h3 ♕xf3 11 ♕xf3 (D):



The exchange on f3 has enhanced Black's control of the dark squares along the a1-h8 diagonal. Smyslov-Fischer, Rovinj/Zagreb 1970 continued 11...♜f6 12 ♕g2 0-0 13 0-0 ♞e8 (since the idea is dark-square control, Black saves his g7-bishop) 14 ♕h6 ♕h8 15 ♜e3 ♜d7 (clearing the diagonal) 16 ♞ab1, and now Fischer

played the very direct 16...♞b6!? 17 ♜c4 ♞a6 18 a3 ♜b6 with strong queenside pressure.

A similar idea arises in the English Opening after 1 c4 c5 2 ♜c3 ♜c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♕g2 ♕g7 5 ♜f3 e5 6 d3 ♜ge7 7 a3 0-0 8 ♞b1 a5 9 ♕g5!? (D).



The intention is to exchange the bishop after 9...h6 (on 9...f6, either 10 ♕d2 or 10 ♕e3!? is played) 10 ♕xe7 ♜xe7 11 ♜d2, with a firm grip on the central light squares. Such concessions of bishops for knights in order to gain central control have become increasingly common of late. Sometimes, of course, one side simply gains time and space, without the grip on a colour-complex shown in these two examples. It is not as though modern players exchange for radically different reasons from their predecessors, but examples like these show how the scope of desirable exchanges has expanded.

Overprotection: A Few Remarks

Nimzowitsch was mercilessly lampooned by Hans Kmoch in a famous article about a game 'Nimzowitsch-Sistemsson' (which was concocted by Kmoch). Supposedly annotated by White, the notes to the game parody Nimzowitsch's annotating style, with numerous references to his own profundity and sophistication, the vulgarity of other chess-players, and the like. Interestingly, Kmoch chose to satirize one of Nimzowitsch's most cherished concepts, that of overprotection. Here is the game, with

only the references to overprotection retained; I apologize for thereby ruining the hilarious effect of Kmoch's complete article, but at least the thrust of it should be clear:

1 e4 e6 2 h4!!

"... Wait just a little while and there will pass before you a miracle of over-protection of more than earthly beauty ..."

2...d5 3 e5! c5 4 d4 cxd4 5 h5! ♖b6 6 h6! ♜xh6 7 ♗h5!! g6 8 ♗h2!!

"... White has completed his development brilliantly and proceeds to overprotect e5. Against this Black is helpless ..."

8...♟f5 9 ♟d3 ♟c6 10 ♟f3 h5 11 b3 ♟g7 12 ♟f4!! ♟d7 13 ♟bd2 ♟c8 14 ♟e2!!

"An extraordinarily deep move. He sees through Black's plans, and in addition he prepares a particularly powerful continuation of his overprotection strategy."

14...♟b4 15 ♟e1!! ♟xd3 16 ♟xd3! ♟xc2 17 ♟ae1!!

"White continues his overprotection without much ado."

17...a5 18 ♟d1! ♟c6!!

"At last Black gets the right idea; overprotecting his pawn at e6. But it is already too late."

19 ♟e2 ♟e7

"Introduced into tournament play by me. See the note to White's 14th move. The king overprotects e6."

20 ♟he1 ♟e8 21 ♟f3

"Completing the over-protection of e5 and thus deciding the fate of the game. Black has no defence. Note the aesthetic effect created by White's position"

21...♟f8

"Now Black threatens to complete the overprotection of e6 by playing ...♟g7. But White has prepared a brilliant combination."

22 g4!! hxg4 23 ♗h7!!

"Now one clearly realizes the masterly understanding of the position which went into White's eight move (♗h2!!)"

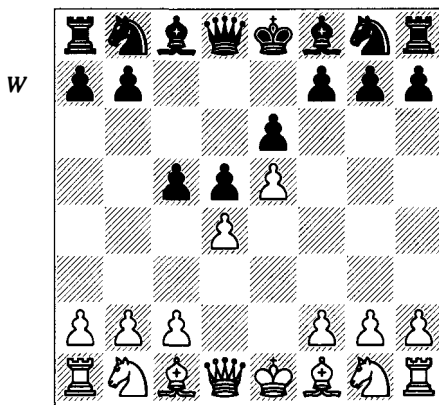
23...gxf3 24 ♟g5#

"...This game has become famous in Denmark as 'the immortal overprotection game'!"

The reader is encouraged to look at any number of books for the complete article (for example, Keene's *Reappraisal*; see the Bibliography). What I find interesting is that Kmoch

satirizes many of Nimzowitsch's writing-style eccentricities, but only one of his chess theories: that of overprotection. What's more, like the comic milking a joke, he seems to think that every mention of 'overprotection' will be good for another laugh (and isn't it?). In 1927, this showed some real insight. As it turned out, the only element of Nimzowitsch's theoretical edifice that was truly ignored or rejected by his successors was that of overprotection. What was this concept? Basically, that there existed key points in a position which, irrespective of how strongly they were attacked by the opponent, deserved protection by many of one's pieces, even if that meant using rooks on closed files or bishops on closed diagonals. In Nimzowitsch's own words, "Weak points, still more strong points, in short everything that we can include in the collective conception of strategically important points, ought to be overprotected. If the pieces are so engaged, they get their reward in the fact that they will then find themselves well-posted in every respect."

His own examples of this new principle tended to be in the French Defence Advance Variation (as were his examples of pawn-chains). He played three variants of this after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 (*D*); it is revealing to see how modern theory assesses them.

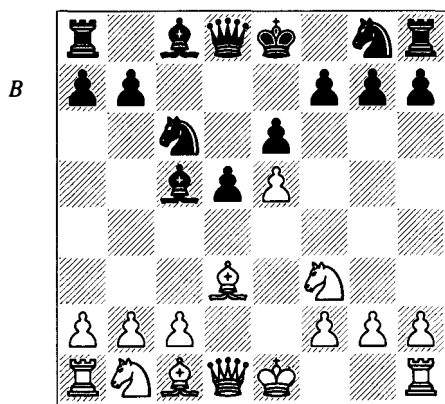


a) 4 c3 ♟c6 5 ♟f3 ♗b6 6 ♟d3. Now after 6...cxd4 7 cxd4 ♟d7, White has to think about merely protecting (much less overprotecting!) the d4-square. Nimzowitsch's own analysis concentrated on the attacks and counterattacks on this square; but as we saw in the notes to Nimzowitsch-Salwe in Chapter 4, Black has

more than enough activity by ignoring d4 and opening lines on the kingside;

b) 4 ♖g4 cxd4 5 ♘f3 ♘c6 6 ♙d3. Here White's idea is somewhat as in the Knoch parody: ♖g3, ♙e1, and perhaps ♙f4, to overprotect e5. If Black plays ...♘ge7-g6, White may play h4-h5. There are several problems with this line, but a very simple one is 6...♙c7 7 ♖g3 (7 0-0 can be answered by 7...♘xe5 8 ♘xe5 ♙xe5 9 ♙f4 ♘f6! or by 7...f6; and 7 ♙f4 allows ...♘ge7-g6 with tempo or just 7...♘b4, equalizing) 7...f6! (for some reason, this direct opening of lines didn't occur to Nimzowitsch's opponents) 8 exf6 (8 ♙f4 g5!; 8 ♙xh7 ♘xe5 9 ♙g6+ ♘d8, and Black's centre more than merely compensates for his inability to castle) 8...♙xg3 9 f7+ ♙xf7 10 hxg3 e5 and already, Black is somewhat better (11 ♙xh7 ♘ge7!);

c) 4 ♘f3 ♘c6 5 dxc5 ♙xc5 6 ♙d3 (D).



Here, although 6...♘ge7 7 ♙f4 ♙b6 8 0-0 ♘g6! 9 ♙g3 ♙xb2 turns out rather well for Black, Nimzowitsch's opponents again neglected simply 6...f6, when 7 ♙e2 fxe5 8 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 9 ♙xe5 ♙f6 is known to equalize, and the consistent overprotection by 7 ♙f4?! actually backfires after 7...fxe5 8 ♙xe5 (8 ♘xe5?

♙f6) 8...♘f6 9 0-0 0-0 (threatening ...♘g4; in many of these lines involving obsession with e5, it turns out that Black's open files and active pieces are White's undoing) 10 h3 ♘e4! 11 ♙e2 ♙xf3! 12 gxf3 ♙g5+ 13 ♙h1 ♘xf2+, etc.

I'm not going to enter into a lengthy critique of overprotection, because it hasn't much to do with our subject, i.e., advances in modern chess. But it seems to me that the concept is flawed on two grounds:

a) Regarding the weaker usage of the term, protecting critical points is just common sense, hardly a separate principle. At its best, overprotection is either a form of preventing freeing moves or transferring pieces via an outpost. Used in this sense, the term is superfluous.

b) When we consider 'overprotection' in the stronger sense, the idea of rendering one's own pieces passive just to focus redundantly on a single point has very few practical applications. In most positions, there are other dynamic factors which are of more importance (as in the French examples above), and the restricted activity of the protecting pieces tends to be a serious drawback in practical play. For whatever reasons, it is hard to find either theoreticians or players today who employ the concept of overprotection.

We have come to the end of Part 1. The theoretical advances and reassessments we have described in these first eight chapters are modest ones, and easy to assimilate. At the same time, the reader has been exposed to the essentials of the classical model. Next, we journey to the contemporary chess world in which much of that model has been rejected. It's an adventurous trip, and occasionally disorienting; as we shall see, someone's been playing with the signposts! But even if we get lost from time to time, I think that you'll enjoy the view.

Part 2: New Ideas and the Modern Revolution

1 Overview

In Part 1, we reviewed classical principles and discussed their extensions and revisions in modern times. Now it is time to indulge ourselves by examining what is truly new and unique about chess in our era. These distinguishing features might be thrown into relief by a short excursion into the past...

The Death of Chess Revisited

The reader will recall that our (rather arbitrary) date of departure into 'modernity' is 1935. The main representatives of the 'hypermodern school' had already passed their peaks. And according to some chess writers, they were considered to have been defeated by the classical school. This was based on tournaments such as New York 1924 and New York 1927 and more importantly, by the persistence of classical players such as Lasker and Capablanca in the world championship, followed by Alekhine, who at any rate was no hypermodern.

This was also the era of talk about 'the death of chess'. There are varying accounts, but the details are inessential with respect to the concept itself. Réti's version in *Modern Ideas in Chess* has it that due to the large number of draws at the beginning of Capablanca's 1921 match with Lasker, Capablanca expressed the following view (quoting Réti now): "Chess technique and the knowledge of openings have progressed to such an extent today that it might, even against a weaker player, be difficult to win a game. As a remedy, he [Capablanca] proposed a reform in chess. He suggested a change in the opening position, and as an example the interchange of the positions of rooks and bishops. I think that perhaps Capablanca's fears are

exaggerated ... But in principle, [he] was certainly right." Réti goes on to agree with Lasker's suggestion that one should be able to win by eliminating the opponent's material (along with a change in the stalemate rule).

According to Imre König's account, Lasker himself, after his match with Capablanca, "predicted that Capablanca's detailed analysis of openings would lead to the death of chess by draws. Capablanca expressed similar views after his defeat by Alekhine." Whoever first floated the idea of the death of chess, I find it revealing that all three of these great players felt that chess had been essentially worked out, that something was wrong with the game, and (most amusingly) that 'detailed' opening theory was responsible for the increasing drawishness of chess. Little did they know!

Perhaps the first point to make is that the 'death by draw' theory was based on some rather scanty evidence in the first place, for example, two matches in which Capablanca was involved. One could argue that Capablanca played conservatively in general, and especially against world-class players in match situations. Also, all three participants in these matches employed an extremely limited opening repertoire, which led to the same lines being repeated and little chance of either side gaining a large advantage. Furthermore, one should note that the Lasker match went only 14 games before Lasker withdrew.

Apart from those considerations, was chess really getting that much more drawish? Looking at databases, one can see an apparent rise in drawishness from the period 1800-1900 (for which I have White winning 46%, Black 36%, with 18% draws) to the period 1901-1935

(44%-32%-24%), but even this 6% rise might be partially explained by a bias in the database games selected, i.e., in a relatively small selection of early games, there is a tendency to include a lot of individual wins (e.g., all Morphy's casual games), as opposed to the complete tournament results which dominate databases with modern games. It is also interesting to compare 1890-1910 (44%-33%-24%, figures rounded), virtually indistinguishable from the 1901-1935 results. Continuing along this vein, did drawishness indeed take over chess in the modern period? We indeed see a definite rise in the 1935-65 era to 41%-28%-31%; hardly a death blow to competitiveness, however. Then, interestingly, a minuscule decline in the draw rate (and slight gain in Black's fortunes) for more recent times (post-1965) at 40%-30%-30%, a figure that has been looking remarkably stable.

So the draw threat was greatly exaggerated, and chess continues apace. Why? It is first interesting to look at what Alekhine said, again quoting König: "Alekhine, however, took the opposite view, saying that the imperfection of technique was the cause of the greater number of draws. As to the over-analysis of openings, he considered that we knew very little about them." Well, yes! In this last respect, Alekhine was simply right, and so many of his contemporaries wrong. I will separately discuss the changes and expansion of modern chess openings towards the end of Part 2. And in general, Part 2 may be said to provide an answer to Lasker and Capablanca's arguments. A great number of factors have gone into the continued decisiveness of modern chess results, despite the greater knowledge, experience, and technical facility of the modern player. The chapters which follow attempt to serve as a guide to some of those factors. Perhaps paramount among them, however, is the gradual relaxation of dogmatism which accompanies modern play.

On the one hand, who cannot have the greatest respect for the genius of a Lasker, Capablanca, Tarrasch or Rubinstein? They were magnificent players who advanced chess enormously and continue to captivate modern generations. In particular, the drama of their confrontations (being so infrequent, and in an era of so few professional players) lends a romance which, to many, seems missing in modern

play. Nevertheless, these players (and their contemporaries) were inevitably unimaginative and limited in several respects. Essentially, the range of positions they considered playable (or even worthy of investigation) was very narrow, and, on the grounds of 'general principles', they continually dismissed ideas and moves which we now consider natural and normal.

We will discuss the movement away from such high concepts in subsequent chapters. For now, although later chapters go into a lot more detail, let's take a brief look at the attitudes of older masters just in the realm of opening theory. First, there's simply the issue of what openings people saw fit to play. In the 1800s, anything but 1 e4 was a bit eccentric; 1 e4 e5 was played in about 64% of games, and 1 e4 with another reply (almost always a French or a Sicilian) was played in about 23%. 1 d4 d5 occurred in about 10% of games (mainly due to an influx at the end of the century, which elicited contempt from some of the Classicists), and other answers to 1 d4 were below the noise level (less than 1% combined). Alternatives to 1 e4 and 1 d4 (Staunton's 1 c4 notwithstanding) were so rare as not even to be a subject of controversy.

By the period 1901-1935, 1 d4 had become orthodox, with 1 d4 d5 grabbing 28% of the games, and other answers to 1 d4 occurring at a respectable 16% of the time. 1 e4 e5 was still being played 31% of the time, with other answers to 1 e4 (still the French and the Sicilian, two-thirds of the time, with some others creeping in) using up 20% of the game space. This leaves a surprising 5% (these numbers are rounded off) for other first moves, as the hyper-moderns begin to leave their mark.

The modern figures are drastically down to 14% for 1 e4 e5 (and lower among the world's top players; see the next paragraph), 35% for other replies to 1 e4 (slightly more than half of these Sicilians!), 15% for 1 d4 d5 (repeat my remark for 1 e4 e5), and 23% for other replies to 1 d4. The 12% for other openings reflects the popularity of the English Opening more than anything else, since 1 ♘f3 tends to transpose to an English or Queen's Pawn opening.

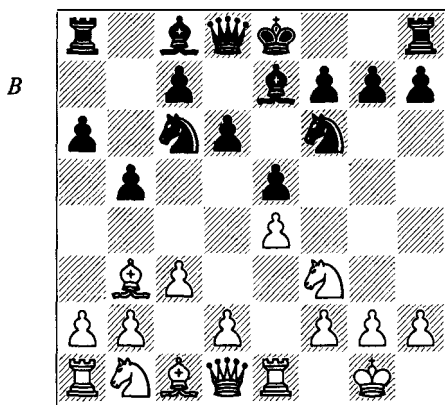
Turning to top-level play (by investigating a database of *Informators*), we see that 1 e4 e5 is still less common at 9.5%, and 1 d4 d5 is played

13.8% of the time. There are some very interesting details when we look more closely. The old Orthodox lines of the Queen's Gambit Declined (including all ... $\text{Qb}7$ lines like the Capablanca Variation, and throwing in the Lasker Variation just for good measure) account for less than 2% of the 1 d4 d5 games, or about a 0.25% of all games. And yet this was the variation which was leading to the 'death of chess'! The fact is that even the formerly narrowly-interpreted lines of 1 d4 d5 have broadened considerably in scope, especially with the popularity of the Slav Defence and Queen's Gambit Accepted, whereas similar things could be said about 1 e4 e5. In his *Last Lectures*, for example, Capablanca, for example, presents the following rather smug view of the Ruy Lopez, an opening he certainly knew a thing or two about:

1 e4 e5 2 $\text{Qf}3$ $\text{Qc}6$ 3 $\text{Qb}5$ a6 4 $\text{Qa}4$ $\text{Qf}6$ 5 0-0 $\text{Qe}7$

"The variation preferred today by a majority of masters..."

6 $\text{Re}1$ b5 7 $\text{Qb}3$ d6 8 c3 (D)



8... $\text{Qa}5$ 9 $\text{Qc}2$ c5 10 d4 $\text{Qc}7$

"It can be said that the opening is over. In this variation, everyone, from critics to grandmasters, seems to agree that the moves of the text are the best ones. Bogoljubow, some time ago, tried to discredit the variation, castling with the black pieces on the eighth instead of the text-move ... $\text{Qa}5$. The innovation did not enjoy great success and the masters have returned to the old variation.

"It is curious how this happens so often. The young masters want to do better than the old

masters, and to prove all kinds of innovations. Sometimes the element of surprise produces good results; but with certain classical variations, as in the present case, the new moves are frustrated by the uncompromising defence of the old guard."

Now I'm not picking on Capablanca, and there are far more egregious examples of dogmatism about openings (see below); but even here, in a very conservative position which was extremely familiar to him (and by no means prone to tactical explosions, as so many modern openings are), he fails to have an appreciation for the possibilities of the game. And this is the crux of the matter: the old masters had an attitude that chess was strictly limited and regulated by a set of principles, and were blind to the flexibility that modern play has revealed. They were extraordinarily quick to condemn anything that 'looked' unusual to them, or even something which, however logical (e.g., Bogoljubow's 8...0-0 idea!), hadn't caught on or had lost one well-known game. Nimzowitsch's win as White over Marshall's Modern Benoni, for example, practically eliminated the opening for a few decades, despite the use of a variation subsequently shown to be harmless to Black.

In the case before us, of course, 8...0-0 went on to become the main line (in fact, it was probably already the most important move by the end of Capablanca's career). One could argue that this is a technical and not a strategic point (although by avoiding h3 in Capablanca's move-order, White gains time to consolidate his centre, a really serious issue which has eliminated 8... $\text{Qa}5$ from normal practice). But beyond the move-order, the fact that ... $\text{Qa}5$ and ...c5 is not Black's only strategy (despite "everyone's" agreement), has been shown by the wide variety of alternative plans later adopted in this variation. Just for example, a database of *Informators* (including 37-69) reveals that out of approximately 800 games beginning with the 8 c3 0-0(!) 9 h3 position, there are indeed 189 games with the traditional 9... $\text{Qa}5$ 10 $\text{Qc}2$ c5 11 d4. However, there are also 123 games with Breyer's move 9... $\text{Qb}8$, 228 games with ... $\text{Qb}7$ and ... $\text{Qe}8$ on the 9th and 10th moves, 60 games with 9...h6, 73 games with 9... $\text{Qd}7$, 39 games with 9... $\text{Qe}6$, and even some interesting

experiments such as the 11 games featuring 9...a5!?

And how many games are there with the 8...♟a5 line given as best by Capablanca? Precisely 1, by that great reviver of historical lines, Bent Larsen. *TWIC* (a database of recent games) also contained only 1 such game (out of about 700 in this variation), won by White in classical style by avoiding h3. The real point is that strategic flexibility and openness to new ideas is characteristic of modern chess. It turns out that experimentation has much more going for it than just the 'element of surprise'.

Of course, I could also quote enormous increases in the use of openings such as the Pirc, Modern, Alekhine's, Caro-Kann, King's Indian, Nimzo-Indian, Benoni, and many others. But it's not only a matter of which openings the old masters picked; it's also how narrowly they were interpreted. One need only look at the today's Sicilian or King's Indian (or Grünfeld or Caro-Kann – or almost any modern opening, for that matter) to see how strategies have diversified into utterly unique paths and sub-variations which are so different in character as to be almost separate openings.

The main point, which we will also pursue in the next chapter with reference to areas beyond the opening, is that even the greatest of the old masters were limited by a powerful dogmatism based on general principles they supposed to be true. A good reference which reveals some of these attitudes is Raymond Keene's *The Evolution of Chess Opening Theory*. I will close this chapter with a few examples from his book, and cite some similar cases I have found elsewhere.

The narrow distribution of opening variations before 1935 (outlined above) had its source in traditional closed-mindedness towards new ideas. Tarrasch, whose works were enormously influential, has recently been the subject of some revisionist denial regarding the dogmatism Nimzowitsch accused him of. But, despite his brilliant writing and undoubted contributions to the game, even a casual look through Tarrasch's *Dreihundert Schachpartien* vindicates Nimzowitsch. Tarrasch stated, for example, that "1...e5 is, theoretically and practically, the only completely satisfactory answer to 1 e4". He said of the Sicilian Defence: "Against the best play, it is bound to fail", and claimed

that the Caro-Kann "cannot possibly be sufficient to give equality". Among many other openings he condemned as inferior, he called the Queen's Gambit Accepted "a strategic error", and the Slav Defence "not adequate" (and "wholly bad" if Black plays ...e6 as well as ...c6, currently a favourite among many of the world's strongest players!). And in the French Defence, of course, he gave 3 e5 a "?" and called 3 ♟c3 ♟b4 "?!", saying "this is well-known to be not good". These latter two opinions, no longer taken seriously, were first challenged by Nimzowitsch in his own writings and practice.

But Keene makes the point that even the relatively 'progressive' voices of Nimzowitsch's time tended towards dogmatism. Nimzowitsch himself called the Modern Benoni 'an unfortunate extravagance'. And Steinitz, the king of eccentric opening moves in the nineteenth century (as well as a brilliant innovator), is quoted by Tarrasch as telling Charousek, who had lost to Tarrasch in a Pirc Defence (in 1896!) that "If you choose such a weird opening, you shouldn't be surprised if you lose the game!". Réti, an avowed opponent of dogmatism in chess, referring to 1 e4, claimed that his own opinion that "the reply 1...e5 is a mistaken one and will be refuted by the consistent attack against e5 as exemplified in the Ruy Lopez is admitted today in the practice of the masters". He also claims that "it can be established that there are two defences against 1 e4 which make it absolutely impossible for the first player to obtain any initiative, and which give Black such an even game, without any difficulties at all, that it has become unwise in practical play to open with 1 e4, since these defences are generally known. They are the Caro Kann Defence and ... 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♟c3 ♟f6 4 ♟g5 dxe4." Despite a modest revival of the latter defence, no one considers it a serious deterrent to 1 e4, and the Caro-Kann is still challenged regularly and with normal success by the world's top players, who have yet to abandon 1 e4 in consequence.

There are certainly many other examples. Alekhine, the most creative opening player of his day, and probably the first who investigated openings well into the middlegame in a truly modern fashion, shared the tendency to reject moves of an experimental nature. We will talk

about his stubborn and rather bizarre views on the Sicilian Defence in a later chapter. He had an aversion to even the most clearly favourable Hedgehog structures for Black, and in general, seemed to dislike the fianchetto. For example, he considered the King's Indian Defence inferior due to the Four Pawns Attack(!), and according to Keene, he felt that 1...g6 was 'a joke' (I'm not sure where this is from; but I found that in his *Best Games*, he at any rate says that 1...g6 is 'rightly considered inferior' and in the New York 1924 tournament book he calls it 'not valid'). Alekhine also maintained that in the Grünfeld, after 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5, 4 cxd5 was a poor move, 'especially after' 4...♘xd5 5 e4, when Black's attack on White's centre after ...♘xc3 and ...c5 gave him 'at least equality'. It is interesting that as late as 1943, in *The Ideas Behind the Chess Openings* (and in later editions), Reuben Fine shared these last two views, saying that versus 1 e4 g6, 2 d4 already gave White an 'appreciable advantage',

and that after the above 5 e4 in the Grünfeld, "Black may well get the better of it". Fine then followed up with a lengthy prose discussion to prove that "♖b3 is the key move for all white attacks in the Grünfeld," a statement he put in italics and called a 'useful rule'. What is most interesting about Fine's assertions is that he arrives at them via prose explanations and general principles, adducing almost no concrete variations. By this time, the new Soviet players had already abandoned such an approach in favour of concrete analysis.

To conclude, who are the villains of this introductory piece? For one thing, a narrow view of the game in which whole areas seem excluded. But even more so, a dogmatic approach. And what does dogma in chess consist of? A blind obedience to the strictures of some general rule or principle. Therefore, we now turn to Chapter 2 to see what's up with such rules and principles.

2 Rule-Independence

Many changes have taken place in modern chess, for example, with respect to new ideas about weaknesses, the relative strengths of minor pieces, the value of the exchange, and considerations of time and dynamism. But the forerunner and in some sense precursor to these changes has been a philosophic notion, now so entrenched that we barely notice it. I call this notion 'rule-independence', for lack of a more comprehensive way to express it. It is simply the gradual divestment on the part of chess-players of the multitudinous generalities, rules, and abstract principles which guided classical chess, and which still dominate our teaching texts. Furthermore, a rejection of the very notion of the 'rule' has taken place, in favour of a pragmatic investigation of individual situations. The intense study of large numbers of positions, in combination with a dramatic increase in the frequency of play by the average professional player, has led to a new approach to chess knowledge. This approach might be described in terms of 'unconscious principles', or subtle and verbally inexpressible guidelines which are continually modified and weighted to fine-tune the assessment of positions. A 'feel' for positional chess is developed, just as in the old days, but one which is unconstrained (or considerably less constrained) by dogma. Hence, 'rule-independence'.

Well, those are just words until I provide some supporting examples, which I will give aplenty in this chapter and throughout Part 2. Before moving on, however, let me risk repeating some of my discussion from Part 1, Chapter 1, if only to give the reader some perspective, and to allow others to speak on this topic. In the last chapter, we began to touch on a number of dogmatic views which led even the most brilliant of players and thinkers to make some rather foolish assessments about certain positions. My contention was that adherence to rules and general principles played a major role in these misassessments. At some point around the 1930s, this dogmatism began to change in

earnest, and Nimzowitsch himself was probably the leading figure in the new attitude. The so-called Hypermodern School was partially responsible for the change, and I'd like to repeat what Réti (a leading Hypermodern spokesman) said:

"It is the aim of the modern school not to treat every position according to one general law, but according to the principle inherent in the position. An acquaintance with other positions and the rules applicable to the treatment thereof is of great use for the purpose of analysing and obtaining a grasp of the particular position under consideration ... the source of the greatest errors is to be found in those moves that are made merely according to rule and not based on the individual plan or thought of the player."

The transitional figure in this modernization, at least among world champions, was certainly Alekhine. We have already seen a sample of his occasional narrow-mindedness in the last chapter; but he was also the first player who systematically deepened his research into a wide variety of openings, and he played positions with a pragmatic reliance upon involved calculations, which is typical of the modern style. At roughly the same time as Réti, Znosko-Borovsky, in *The Middle Game in Chess*, commented about this side of Alekhine:

"...in the middle game, when a certain plan is under consideration, the general principles (occupation of the centre, open lines, strong and weak squares) are of less account than the selection of an object of attack, against which all the available forces are to be launched. On this point Alekhine goes so far as to say 'all general considerations must be entirely forgotten' and 'only that which contributes to the execution of the plan selected is of any avail.'"

Pachman adds to these sentiments in his *Complete Chess Strategy, Vol 1*, in a chapter called "The Development of Modern Chess". He describes Alekhine as discovering aspects of play "which lay beyond the limits of acquired

principles and which almost defied human understanding ... Alekhine's victory [over Capablanca] was significant, because it pointed to the inexhaustible possibilities of chess while refuting arguments about the stagnation of the game."

It is this association between being 'beyond principles' and opening inexhaustible possibilities that interests us. Jumping forward to our time, it might be worthwhile to hear about some related topics from Mark Dvoretsky, certainly one of the best, if not the best, characterizer of the features of modern play. Dvoretsky talks about rules which relate to certain types of positions, like 'opposite-coloured bishops in the middlegame favour the attacker'. Then he goes on to say: "However, in grandmasters' and masters' arsenals there are also several finer, less formal evaluations. We understand that 'in certain positions you have to act a certain way', but at times it is difficult to formulate exactly what that 'certain position' is." His point is that deep study of many related positions (and the openings from which they arise) is the concrete method by which this difficulty is resolved.

It is important to distinguish between 'rules' in the sense given above and practical guidelines for play. Such guidelines may be stated in a rule format, but they are essentially just helpful reminders, and don't need 'refuting', because they are assumed to be of limited application. A good example of such a guideline, which has very many exceptions and yet is still a useful thing to ponder over the board, is the idea of improving the position of one's worst piece. Kosikov points out that in slow, manoeuvring positions where "time is not of decisive significance" (alas, how many such positions are there?), activating the worst-placed piece is generally a good idea. I don't doubt that all strong players heed this rule, even if only subconsciously, in the sense that they are very aware of poorly-placed pieces and are always factoring in how feasible it is to improve their position. But it is not a theoretical principle of the type "backward pawns on an open file are weak", for example. Incidentally, Alekhine had an interesting variant of Kosikov's rule. He said about an early knight move in the opening: "the development problem of this knight, *being here the most elaborate one*, must be solved on the very first opportunity." [italics his] There is a

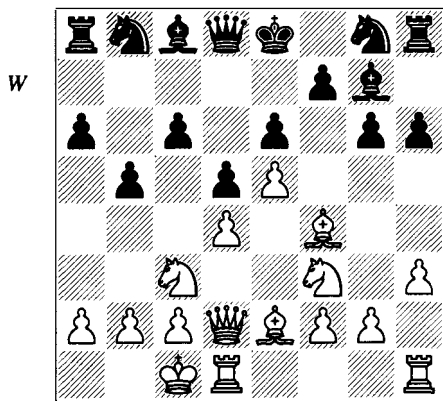
lot of validity to this idea, although it makes a rather poor 'rule', because in many openings, the problem piece (e.g., the bishop on c8 in a Stonewall Dutch Defence) is attended to only after most of the other pieces are out. Still, if one considers various French Defence variations with White having e5 in (Advance Variation, Winawer, or Tarrasch with 3 ♘d2 ♗f6 4 e5), there exist some lines (by no means all) in which Black spends several tempi trying to do something useful with his c8-bishop before he begins to get his other pieces out and gets castled. Similarly, in the Caro-Kann Defence, Black often plays ...♙f5 (or ...♙e6 or ...♙g4) at the first opportunity. Sometimes one may even move the king at an early stage, just to resolve its status and clear the way for other pieces.

While on this subject, some such 'guideline rules' are probably just as suspect as the more concrete ones. While the reader may be quite open to a rejection of rules like 'knights on the rim stand badly', for example, he or she is less likely to feel comfortable with any questioning of that most-repeated of all principles: 'The most important thing is to have a plan' (or: 'planless play leads to disaster'). I will have more to say about this later in the book, but hear what Dvoretsky says in a section called 'The Plan': "There is a popular opinion that the highest strategic art is the ability to envelop nearly the whole game in a profound plan, and that this is precisely how leading grandmasters think. This is a delusion. It is nonsensical to map out an overly long plan – the very next move could totally change the situation on the board and give it a completely different direction." He then goes on to talk about using the phrase 'the next strategic operation' in place of the word 'plan', to emphasize the local, time-limited, and pragmatic nature of most actual planning. I think that this is a very astute distinction which applies particularly to the heavy and multifaceted positions which arise from so many modern openings.

The Demise of the General Rule; Examples from Practice

Andy Soltis opens his excellent book *The Art of Defence* with a humorous little example which

I hope that he doesn't mind me pilfering:



Khliavin – Zhdanov
Latvian Ch 1961

This position arose after 1 e4 c6 2 ♘c3 d5 3 ♙f3 g6 4 d4 ♙g7 5 h3 a6 6 ♙f4 ♙f6 7 e5 ♘g8 8 ♗d2 b5 9 ♙e2 h6 10 0-0-0 e6.

Here Soltis comments: "It doesn't take long to conclude that White has a very strong game. He has developed nearly all of his pieces while Black's only developed piece, his king's bishop, bites on granite. Black's queenside is full of holes on dark squares and he has just locked in his queen's bishop. A quick mating attack is assured, you might conclude. And you'd be right:

11 g4 ♘d7 12 ♙g3 ♙f8 13 ♗df1 ♘b6 14 ♘d1 a5 15 ♘e1 b4 16 ♘d3 ♘c4 17 ♗e1 ♗b6 18 b3 ♗xd4 19 bxc4 ♗a1+ 20 ♘d2 dxc4 21 ♙f4 ♗xa2 22 ♙e3 ♙b7 23 ♗d2 g5 24 ♘h5 c3 25 ♗d3 ♗d8 26 ♗e4 ♙c5+ 27 ♙f3 ♗d4 28 ♗e3 ♗d5+ and mates

Yes, Black delivered the mate. And in less than 20 moves from the diagram."

A clever rhetorical device by Andy. One might also notice a few other features of this example which he doesn't mention. By move 17, Black still only has **one** piece not on its original square! And it is a piece he has moved three times, whereas two other pieces he has moved twice each ... back to their starting positions! Having violated every rule in the book, what does he then do? Moves his queen out, of course, and conducts a little one-piece attack which wraps up the game.

Soltis's point is about the art of defending well, but it's not clear that much defence was

involved here. More relevant, it seems to me, was Black's violation of classical precepts in favour of concrete structural goals. Now, I wouldn't argue that in the above game Black's provocation was fully correct (although it may have been so); but I would say that it involves a typical modern tendency, even if in a rather extreme form. A number of traditional rules are jettisoned in seemingly casual fashion, such as: developing one's pieces; not moving a piece twice in the opening; not making too many pawn moves in the opening (7 of the first 10 moves), and especially not *flank* pawns (here, advanced versus no corresponding weakness in the opponent's position); and finally, not moving the queen out before the other pieces.

This sort of black set-up is unusual, but not completely so. Soltis's example came from a Caro-Kann Defence, but off the top of my head, I can think of two other openings in which such undeveloping strategies are pursued fairly often: the French Defence (various lines with ...b6 and ...♙b4-f8 or ...♙f6-g8) and the Modern Defence. And less extreme forms arise throughout chess, for example, in the Alekhine, Pirc, and Scandinavian Defences.

Here's an example of a different type of rule-independence which illustrates a number of key modern notions:

Suba – Sax
Hastings 1983/4

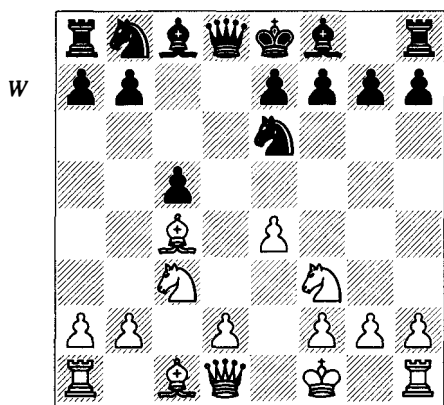
1 c4 c5 2 ♙f3 ♙f6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 cxd5 ♘xd5 5 e4

Nimzowitsch! He first played this versus Rubinstein in 1926. In general, Nimzowitsch was the first player to ignore backward pawns and structural weaknesses in so many situations. In this case, White's d-pawn is classically backward on an open file, and there is a terrible hole on d3. In fact, White's strategy was slow to catch on; Botvinnik (who was also uninhibited by backward d-pawns) was the next to pick it up, and not until the 1970s was there a real revival of the move.

5...♘b4 6 ♙c4

These moves have now been played hundreds of times, of course; but they have a wonderful beginner's quality to them, don't you think? Notice that 6 d4 cxd4 7 ♘xd4?? fails to 7...♗xd4.

6...♖d3+ 7 ♖e2 ♖f4+ 8 ♖f1 ♖e6 (D)

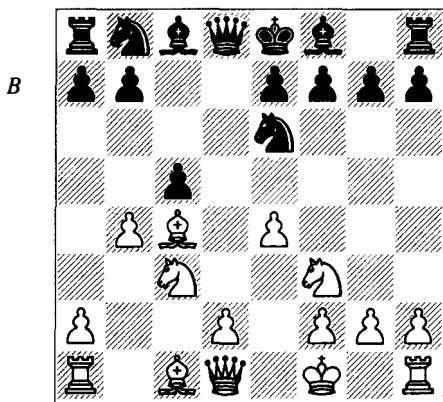


Which side is being more 'modern'? White dances around with his king and ignores weaknesses, whereas Black moves the same knight for the sixth time, when no other piece has been touched! But notice that he prevents d4, considering a structural gain worth more than mere considerations of development.

9 ♖e5!?

This opening is a terrific example of modern play. 9 d3, which would solidify the centre and free the c1-bishop, is hardly ever played (4 times out of 110 games in the database I'm looking at, and only in the least modern examples). The text-move is apparently less logical, moving an already developed piece, and further abandoning control of the key square d4; but it is in fact much more to the point than 9 d3.

The really revealing thing is to consider White's two main alternatives to those moves. The first one, played in numerous very high-level grandmaster games, is 9 b4! (D).



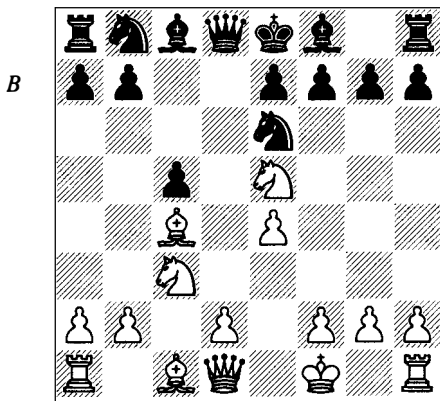
OK, giving up a flank pawn for central control is not exactly unheard of, but when Black has no weaknesses, and White can't castle and connect rooks? Well, it turns out that after 9...cxb4 10 ♖e2!, White is about to play d4, and then things like ♖b2, h4-h5, and ♖h3 or ♖h4, when his mobile centre and lead in development probably more than make up for his pawn deficit (see, for example the game Hübner-Tukmakov, Wijk aan Zee 1984 and later examples). The king on f1 suddenly doesn't stand so badly.

Eventually, someone figured out that by declining White's offer and offering his own pawn instead, Black could gain a critical tempo needed to cover d4, by 9...g6! 10 bxc5 ♖g7. Without pursuing opening theory too far, it turns out that after 11 ♖xe6 ♖xe6 12 d4 ♖c6 13 ♖e3 ♖a5 intending ...0-0-0, Black gets great pressure for the pawn, with equality being the ultimately most probable result. Needless to say, although the books stop there, this is not the end of the story. An entirely logical newer development by White (after unsatisfactory results with 10 bxc5) was 10 ♖b1 ♖g7 11 ♖e2!, as in Losos-Radola, corr. 1993 and a couple of other games, keeping an eye on d4 and contemplating bxc5 and/or ♖xe6. In fact, this whole variation probably deserves more attention, which is also the typical verdict for hundreds of newly-invented positions in our extraordinarily rich chess age.

An even more bizarre outcome of this debate was White's next attempt from the penultimate diagram, Suba's 9 h4!?, which Murey may have been the first to play. Well, why not? If Black wants to spoil my fun with ...g6, says White, I'll be ready for h5 in response! This Larsenesque move (when in doubt, advance your rooks' pawns!) is not as silly as it looks. Suba gives 9...h6 10 ♖e5! (in view of 10...g6? 11 ♖f3; compare the next note in the game); and 9...♖c6 10 ♖g5! ♖xg5?! 11 hxg5, which he says is better for White, although I'm not so sure after 11...g6. Suba (a truly modern thinker, even for these times, to whom we will return in later chapters) says that "The move 9 h4 corresponds to the position's general requirements and increases White's potential. It provides *luft* for the white king, space for the rook and an outpost on g5."

Whatever. The interesting thing to me here is the *sequence* of games by which these ideas were reached. In hindsight, of course, any crazy move can be justified ‘positionally’, but it took top-flight GMs many years even to find 9 b4. In fact, 9 d3 or 9 g3 was played in the few games of the 1930s and 1940s, and 9 b4 wasn’t discovered until the 1980s. Then many well-publicized games occurred before Black hit upon the 9...g6 idea. And really, is 9 h4 a brilliantly-conceived move arising purely out of the ‘demands of the position’? Of course not. As Suba himself states, he found it after becoming disillusioned with 9 ♖e5 g6! (see the next note). It is, like 9 b4 or even 8...♖e6 or 5 e4 (both of which were new ideas at one point), a pragmatic response to a concrete problem. This is very important to understand. In modern chess, the analysis and work come first, and the supporting verbiage comes later (if at all) for the sake of closure, or more often, for the sake of the popular audience.

Now we return to the position after 9 ♖e5:



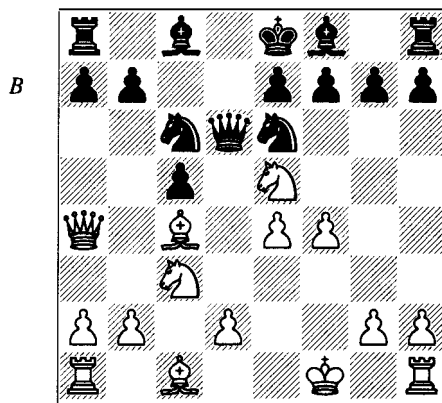
9...♗d6

Suba points to earlier games with 9...♗d4 10 ♗a4+ ♕d7 11 ♖xd7 ♗xd7 with satisfactory play for Black. Ironically, the two moves which actually bring out a new minor piece, 9...♖d7? 10 ♖xf7! ♗xf7 11 ♕xe6+ ♗xe6 12 ♗b3+ with a winning attack (as occurred in one game), and 9...♖c6?! 10 ♖xc6 bxc6 11 d3 (intending ♕e3, ♖a4, ♗c1, etc.) both favour White. In fact, it is to prevent ...♖c6 or ...♖d7 that 9 ♖e5 is played; and in that sense, it is a prophylactic move, a concept we will discuss in later chapters.

Finally, Black (specifically Timman) found 9...g6!, a move which Suba calls ‘rock-solid’. It

is typical, I think, that the latter move, still refraining from bringing a piece out, but aiming at the critical d4-square, is the one which eventually came to be the solution to 9 ♖e5. The fact that the directly developing moves are unsatisfactory may be the result of some deep principle, but if so, it was a principle unknown to grandmasters! Rather, they subjected this variation to increasingly deep and creative analysis until the truth of the position began to reveal itself. Once again, then, this is an example of pragmatism replacing principle.

10 f4 ♖c6 11 ♗a4 (D)



11...♖d8

Instead, 11...♕d7 12 ♖b5 ♗b8 13 ♖xd7 ♗xf4+? 14 ♕g1 ♖xd7 15 d4 ♗xe4 16 d5 wins a piece. Is this tactic fundamentally guaranteed by the nature of the position? I doubt it; we should say instead that the tactics end up favouring White. If even one such line had worked for Black, White would simply have to abandon 9 ♖e5 (or 10 f4, or 11 ♗a4) as insufficient to achieve an advantage.

12 d4!

Suddenly, lines are ripped open and the game concludes in the way any Morphy or Alekhine game might have. As 12...♗xd4 13 ♖b5 wins immediately, the game concluded:

12...cxd4 13 ♖b5 ♗b8 14 ♖xd4 f6 15 ♖dxc6 bxc6 16 ♕f7+! 1-0

A final point about this game. While it is certainly a fun little miniature, I don’t think the average modern professional would play through it with a feeling of amazement or incredulity. We have internalized the modern, pragmatic approach to such an extent that the moves seem

almost 'normal'. But it would be great fun to see this game annotated by Tarrasch, Capablanca, or even Alekhine! I suspect we would get a number of expressions of horror, at least between moves 5 and 9, as well as a healthy dose of ridicule. And it's highly doubtful that any of them would have suggested 9 h4 as an improvement!

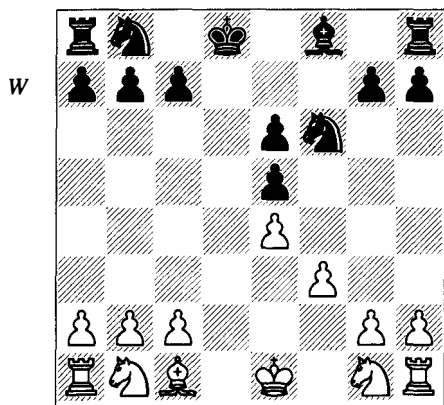
The following example (also dealt with in Neil McDonald's book *Positional Sacrifices*), is far less eccentric, but illustrates the flaunting of two general rules in the more tranquil setting of a queenless middlegame:

Yusupov – Christiansen

Las Palmas 1993

1 d4 d6 2 e4 ♟f6 3 f3 e5 4 dxe5 dxe5 5 ♖xd8+ ♜xd8 6 ♙c4 ♙e6 7 ♙xe6 fxe6 (D)

Right from the start, we see a willingness to take on the dreaded doubled pawns. What's worse, they are isolated as well! But Black has two reasons to feel secure. One is that the set of doubled centre pawns controls important squares on the only open file, namely d4 and d5, as well as f5 and f4. The other is simply the pragmatic consideration that Black's e-pawns are difficult to attack and relatively easy to defend.



8 ♜h3!

Don't put your knights on the rim! Well, knights are living on the edge these days, as we shall see in Chapter 5. But the case before us is really simple. Neither side is about to make any dramatic pawn-breaks, so there is plenty of time to manoeuvre pieces to their best posts. In

the case before us, that would involve the knight going to d3 via f2; where would it go from e2? As McDonald points out, ♜f2-d3 could be followed by ♜d2-c4 and ♙d2-c3 with a three-way attack on the forward e-pawn.

8...♙c5

So Black decides to cede his (relatively bad) bishop to prevent White's idea.

9 ♜f2 ♙xf2+ 10 ♜xf2 ♜c6 11 ♙e3 ♜e7 12 ♜a3!

Yusupov has no inhibitions about these flank knights! This time, the idea is more subtle: he doesn't want Black's knight settling in on d4, so he will be playing c3 soon. Then – behold! – a route to the ideal d3-square has been opened: ♜c2-e1-d3.

12...a6?!

McDonald rightly criticizes this move, suggesting simply 12...♙ad8 13 c3 (13 ♜b5 a6 14 ♜xc7? ♙d7 15 ♙b6 ♙c8) 13...♙d7 and ...♙hd8 “and Black would have a safe position”. White could probably keep up a nagging pressure for many moves to come; but such a position arguably justifies Black's decision to take on the doubled pawns at move 6. See also the note to Black's 16th move.

13 c3 ♙hd8 14 ♜e2 h6

Again, 14...♙d7 was preferable.

15 ♜c2 ♙d7 16 ♙hd1 ♙ad8

McDonald points out that had Black doubled earlier, then either both pairs of rooks would now come off (and therefore White's later pawn advances would not open files for a remaining rook, as happens in the game); or White would have to allow Black complete control of the d-file. One feels that in that case, the game would probably have been drawn.

17 ♙xd7+ ♙xd7 18 ♜e1 ♜e8 19 ♜d3 ♜d6 20 ♙f2!

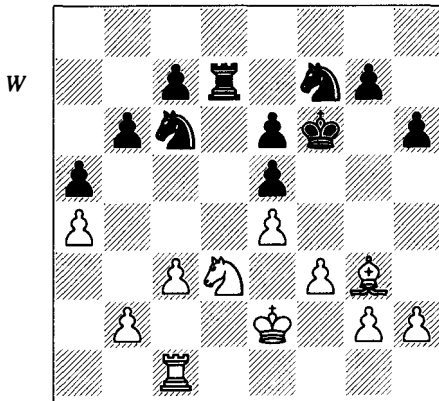
With the plan of ♙g3 followed by b4, a4, ♙b1, and b5. Black moves quickly to prevent this.

20...b6 21 ♙g3 ♜f7 22 a4 a5 23 ♙c1 ♜f6 (D)

24 b4!

A very interesting decision. White will give up the apparently powerful d4-square to Black's knight, because he sees that in the resulting position, e5 will be weak and he may have a devastating passed a-pawn.

24...♙d8



Yusupov gives 24...axb4 25 cxb4 ♖d4+ 26 ♜e3 c6 27 a5 bxa5 28 bxa5 ♙a7 29 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 30 ♙xe5+ ♜xe5 31 ♙c5+, winning.

25 b5 ♜e7 26 ♙f2

Now we've returned to a type of classical technique (which Mayer calls 'the Steinitz Restriction Method'), used by the possessor of a bishop versus a knight in the endgame. First the knights' forward outposts are taken away by pawns (here, b5 and e4); and then White opens lines for his bishop (here, by c4-c5). Yusupov points out that the immediate 26 c4 is tricky due to 26...c5! 27 bxc6 ♜xc6, although in fact, White looks much better in that case as well.

26...♙b8 27 c4 c5

Now, although White won with the sacrifice 28 ♜xc5?! bxc5 29 ♙xc5, this may not have been sufficient for an objectively winning advantage. Far better, as it turns out, was the other sacrifice 28 ♙xc5! bxc5 29 ♜xc5, for example, 29...♙a8 30 ♜d7+ ♜g6 31 c5 and the pawns are simply devastating.

This was a simple but instructive game between two creative players. Both of their ideas were almost certainly legitimate, but White had the better practical chances and on this day, also played better. One doubts if either GM was burdened by doubts about 'breaking the rules' of chess.

Description Versus Reality

Before entering into discussions of specific rules and principles, I should make a simple distinction which applies to my notes as well as anyone else's. One must always keep in mind the difference between a description of play

and the play itself. For all I will say about rejecting rules, it is still true that we must use them as tools when annotating a game. Thus, for example, there is no substitute for saying something like: "and Black stands better because of his two bishops and White's backward pawn on the open d-file." One simply has to bear in mind that such a statement has an implied subtext, for example: "Black stands better because, although there are many cases of two bishops being inferior, this is not one of them, since the knights in this particular position have no useful outposts and White can't play the pawn-break that might force a transformation of the pawn structure leading to the creation of an outpost (or he could do so, but at the cost of allowing a strong attack against his king, as shown by this variation..., etc.). Also, although backward pawns are perfectly acceptable in many positions, the one in this exact position is actually weak because it lacks the protection of a bishop on e2 and White can't implement the dynamic pawn-breaks by b4 or d4 which would normally justify taking on such a backward pawn. For example, 23 b4 would fail to ...", and so forth.

Naturally, we don't kill trees for the sake of such explanations, which in reality are usually even more complicated and qualified than the one I have given. Instead, we use abbreviated statements of principles as indicators to guide the reader's thoughts in the direction of our own. It is very important to realize that a player's use of such descriptions in written notes by no means implies he had given thought to them during the game. I think that there is a great danger here for the student. He or she will pick up a book of annotated games by some world-class player and assume from such general descriptions that "this is the way the great players think". In reality, most players are unconcerned with giving exact descriptions of their thought-processes; it is much easier to characterize a position generally, with hindsight, and ignore the gory details. For those who want something more revealing, although difficult, I recommend Jon Speelman's excellent collection (see the Bibliography), which provides a refreshing dose of reality for those who think they can get by on general considerations alone.

The Royal Guard and How It Strays

Let's move on now to some snapshot examples of how modern chess treats (or mistreats) the general rules and principles of yore, with the understanding that we will be saying much more about such principles in the following chapters on pawn play, the bishop, the knight, etc.

We already talked about the precept against 'pawn-hunting when undeveloped', and especially hunting for flank pawns, in Chapter 2 of Part 1. I could conceivably have included that discussion in this more 'revolutionary' section of the book, since players are now willing to go to great lengths to secure a pawn in so many situations. Please refer there for some typical examples. A similar older precept, also dealing with pawns (and originating with Steinitz) is that one should not move pawns in front of one's king. The basis for this idea is fairly straightforward. If, in a position where Black has castled on the kingside after a double e-pawn opening, for example, Black moves his pawn to h6, that pawn is a natural target for the advance g4-g5, opening the g-file. In an analogous manner, if the same king is resting on the queenside, the move ...a6 or ...c6 begs for retribution by b4-b5, whereas ...b6 tempts advances such as a4-a5.

Today, one sees players moving the pawns in front of their kings on a regular basis, particularly in certain pawn structures. It's fair to say that this tends to be associated with one of two factors which make this 'obviously' OK:

a) one side has a space advantage on that side of the board, as well as a stable centre, so that counterattack against one's king is hardly a danger;

b) one or both sides has fianchettoed, so by definition, there is a pawn moved right in front of the king (i.e., g3 or ...g6); in such a situation, additional moves like h3/...h6 and f4/...f5 tend to be much safer.

If case 'b' seems like a silly example, we discuss elsewhere the enormous prejudice against the fianchetto which persisted well into the 1920s and 1930s; part of the objection to the fianchetto was, of course, weakening squares

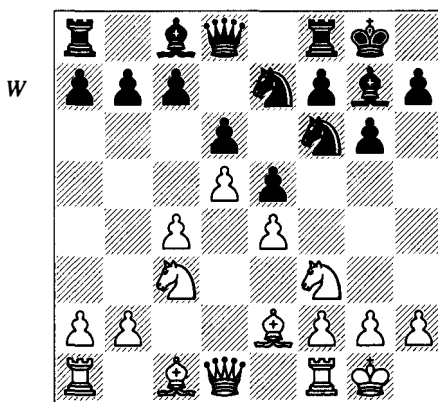
around one's king and giving pawns a target for attack.

There is also a third idea behind the advance of pawns in front of the castled king:

c) prophylaxis, or the preventing of concrete ideas which one's opponent might want to implement. All three of these reasons will be encountered below.

Let's look at a main-line King's Indian Defence for a moment:

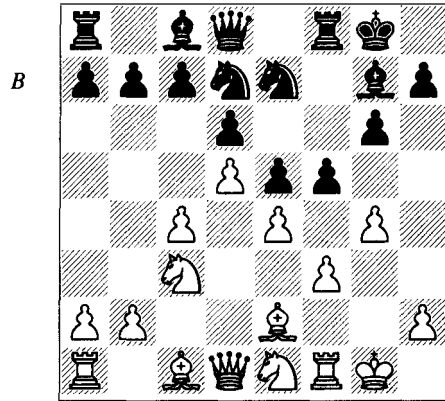
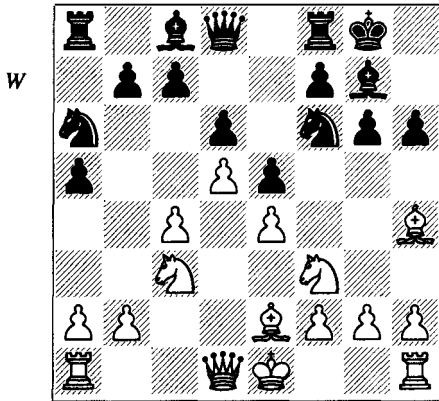
1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♙g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♘f3 0-0 6 ♙e2 e5 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 d5 ♘e7 (D)



Black has ...g6 already in, of course, but as lengthy experience has shown, he will also not hesitate to play for ...f5, and then further ...f4, ...g5-g4, etc. We are so used to this that it almost goes without saying. Furthermore, it hardly seems like such a radical or modern thing to do, since the pawn-chains dictate a black kingside attack and a white one on the queenside.

Well, there are several interesting things to discuss here. First of all, this is a very good example of how flexible modern chess strategy is. I have just said that the pawn structure 'dictates' ...f5-f4, etc., as if there is a principle involved here. But it turns out that it is only the concrete nature of the position which commands the troops. As students of the King's Indian Defence know, had White played the venerable and still-popular line 7 d5 a5 8 ♙g5 h6 9 ♙h4 ♘a6 (D), a whole new 'principle' arises:

In fact, after either 10 0-0 or 10 ♘d2, Black much more frequently plays ...h5 (another pawn move in front of the king!) than ...f5. For example, 10 0-0 ♙e8 (or here 10...♙d7 11 ♘d2 ♙b8!? 12 a3 ♘h7 13 ♙b1 h5!) 11 ♘d2 ♘h7 12



a3 ♖d7, and doesn't it look like Black has been preparing ...f5? But it happens that after each of 13 ♖b5, 13 ♗h1, and 13 b3, the move 13...h5 is the more popular one, and ...f5 is indefinitely delayed or sometimes skipped. It turns out that *in this case*, the activation of the 'bad' bishop on g7 takes precedence. This is a result of years of experimentation and analysis, and any rules one might want to adduce to explain it would be rather feeble in the face of the powerful message sent by that practice.

Of course there are many other examples from the same pawn structure, for example, ones in which Black actually plays on the *queenside* and foregoes ...f5. This occurs in the main 7 0-0 ♖c6 lines after 8 d5 ♗e7 9 ♖d2 c6 or 9...♙d7 10 a3 a5 intending ...a4; but also fairly frequently after 7 0-0 ♖bd7, e.g., 8 ♖e1 c6 9 ♙f1 a5 10 ♖b1 ♗e8 11 d5 ♖c5 and ideas like ...♙d7, ...cxd5 and ...b5 or ...a4 can follow, depending upon the course of play. The point is that just shifting the position of Black's knights slightly can completely change his most appropriate plan.

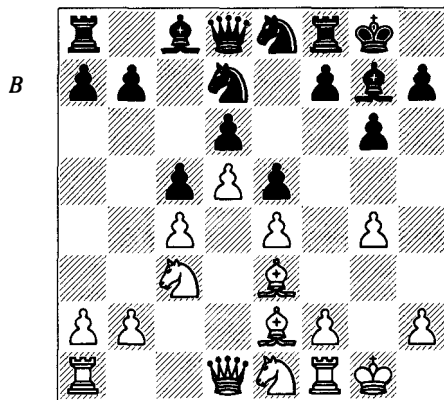
Nevertheless, I sense that the reader will not be overly impressed with this example. Everyone knows that Black can get away with ...f5 and other kingside pawn moves in such a position because he has the natural levers there, and his king is quite safe. What's the big deal? Well, let's look at this from the other point of view, White's. So it's obvious that the kingside is Black's territory, right? How about this modern idea in the same variation:

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 ♙g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♖f3 0-0 6 ♙e2 e5 7 0-0 ♖c6 8 d5 ♗e7 9 ♗e1 ♖d7 10 f3 f5 11 g4!? (D)

This is a fully legitimate move which has been played in hundreds of GM games. It is, again, a purely pragmatic move: White wants to block the kingside, normally by h4 and g5. Then he will have a free hand on the queenside with the standard c5 break. A related system, developed later, is probably more effective; instead of 10 f3 in this line, he plays 10 ♖d3 f5 11 ♙d2 ♖f6 12 f3 f4 13 g4!?, an irritating variation for Black to meet, against which he can end up positionally lost if he fails to respond accurately.

So did the pawn structure 'dictate' *white* pawn advances in front of his king as well? That would be a tough case to make, whereas the pragmatic approach (if it works, I'll play it) seems more persuasive. Let's continue to look at this opening from White's point of view. One modern idea in a very old system is:

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 ♙g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♖f3 0-0 6 ♙e2 ♖bd7 7 0-0 e5 8 ♙e3 c6 9 d5 c5 10 ♗e1 ♗e8 11 g4! (D)

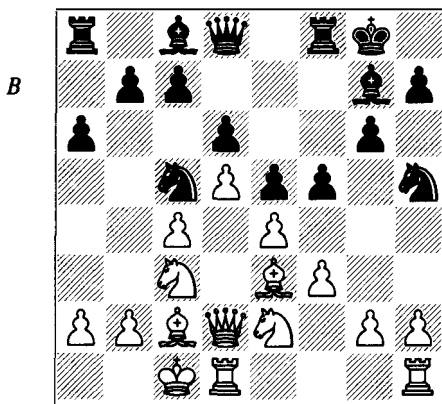


Wrong side of the board, isn't it? Previously, 11 ♖d3 had been the main move.

Let's see how play continued in some typical examples from the diagram: 11...f5 12 exf5 gxf5 13 gxf5 ♖b6 14 ♖f3! (an earlier game Gelfand-Romero, Wijk aan Zee 1992 also illustrates White's little notion: 14 ♖h1 ♙xf5 15 ♖g1 ♖f6 16 ♖f3! ♖g4 17 ♖g5 ♖xe3 18 fxe3 e4 19 ♖e6!, winning) 14...♙xf5 15 ♖g5 ♖e7 16 ♖h1 ♖f6 17 ♖g1 ♖h8 18 ♖d2 with a clear advantage (Kramnik also gives 18 ♖g3!?) Kramnik-Knaak, Dortmund 1992. You may notice, by the way, that the players of White in these games, so coolly advancing that pawn in front of their king on the 'wrong' side of the board, are mere 2700+ players.

What about the other side of the board? Well, White doesn't castle queenside much in the King's Indian, but an obvious example of moving pawns in front of the king arises in the Sämisch Variation:

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 ♙g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 ♙e3 e5 7 d5 ♖h5 8 ♖d2 f5 9 0-0-0 ♖d7 10 ♙d3 ♖c5 11 ♙c2 a6 12 ♖ge2 (D)



OK, we have opposite-side castling, and Black (so far) has only advanced pawns on the side his king is on. What should White do? Well, anyone who is familiar with this type of position knows that White has won many games by pushing his *queenside* pawns aggressively forward, as if his king were safely tucked away elsewhere. The usual idea is b4 and c5, and if Black plays the logical ...a5, White generally plays a3 and simply allows the open a-file. It turns out (a key phrase in this book, which emphasizes that these conclusions have

been reached by dint of long practice) that White's space advantage and greater manoeuvring room on the queenside is just enough to offset the dangerous-looking pawn-breaks Black can try on the queenside. White's space protects him from attack.

That's the idea. Let's see an example from practice, in which the black player puts up resistance to this idea, as one might expect from a world champion:

Timman – Kasparov

Linares 1992

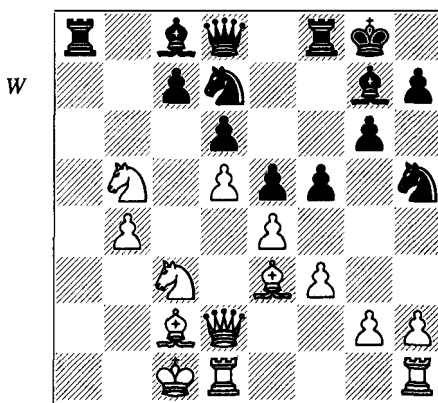
12...b5!

Black lashes out; let's see what happens if he doesn't act quickly: 12...b6 13 ♖b1 ♖b8 14 b4! f4 15 ♙f2 ♖d7 16 ♖c1 ♖f7 17 ♖a1 ♙f8 18 ♖d3 and White soon broke with c5 in Gheorghiu-Yanofsky, Tel-Aviv 1966. Such positions have arisen time and again, and are very awkward for Black.

13 b4 ♖d7 14 cxb5

14 exf5!? gxf5 15 ♖g3 would be an attempt to play on the kingside; but also very interesting is Kasparov's suggestion 14 c5!? a5 15 a3 axb4 16 axb4 dxc5 17 bxc5 b4 18 ♖b5!?

14...axb5 15 ♖xb5! ♖xa2 16 ♖ec3 ♖a8 (D)



17 ♖b2!

Walking right into potential tricks on the long diagonal; but again, White's space defends him, and now the queenside is his.

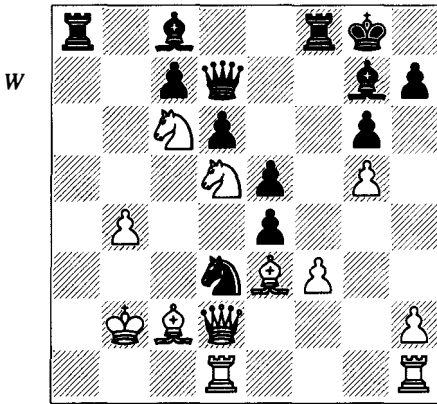
17...♖df6 18 ♖a7! fxe4 19 ♖c6 ♖d7 20 g4!?

Kasparov concedes White a small edge after 20 ♙xe4 as well.

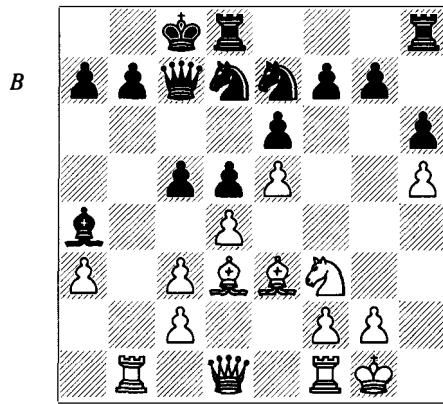
20...♖f4 21 g5 ♜6xd5

21...♜6h5? is positionally hopeless.

22 ♜xd5 ♜d3+! (D)



is a prophylactic advance, designed to thwart Black's normal course of action. Consider this position:



Forced, as was proven in analysis by both players. Black must open lines.

Here, Timman miscalculated and erred by 23 ♜xd3? exd3, when Black's attack proved too strong. But as the combined analysis of various players later showed, he could have played simply 23 ♜b1! with a large advantage, the main line running 23...♜xf3 24 ♜hf1 ♜xf1 25 ♜xf1 ♜b7 26 ♜f6+! ♜xf6 27 gxf6 ♜f7 28 ♜a5!, and Timman demonstrated a clear edge for White from this position.

The details aren't important, of course. What we see is that in the King's Indian Defence, both sides can and do advance pawns in front of their kings, regardless of 'whose' side of the board they're contesting.

Another very interesting example of this phenomenon comes up in the French Defence, Winawer Variation. After years and years of games following the moves 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜c3 ♜b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♜xc3+ 6 bxc3, White has tried any number of set-ups with moves such as ♜f3, a4, ♜a3, ♜d3 and the like. But only in recent years has the idea of playing h4-h5 taken hold. To begin with, that idea was used mainly for attacking purposes, with a rook-lift to h4, perhaps followed by ♜g4 (to attack the kingside), or by dxc5 and ♜hb4 (to attack a black king on the queenside). Only in the last few years has White realized that h4-h5 goes well with castling kingside. This might seem paradoxical (why weaken the h5-pawn and the kingside at the cost of two tempi?), but in fact, it

Svidler – Shaked

Tilburg 1997

Traditionally in such positions, without the inclusion of h4-h5, Black has been able to play ...c4 and then challenge the kingside by means of ...f6. Then he either gains a big centre by meeting exf6 with ...gxf6 or is able to gain influence on the kingside by ...fxe5, ...♜df8, and often, pushing his remaining pawns on that side of the board. But here, with h4-h5 in, White has deliberately provoked the advance ...c4, because now the h5-pawn cramps Black (preventing ...♜g6 or an effective ...g5, for example). In fact, the long-term chances on that side of the board are White's, after ♜h4 and ♜g4 for example, with an eventual f4, g4, and f5. The immediate 13...c4 14 ♜e2 f6 might run into simply 15 ♜f4 (note the lack of ...♜g6 or ...g5 here) 15...♜c6 16 ♜e1, intending 16...fxe5 17 ♜xe5 ♜dxe5 18 ♜g4, when e5 is falling and Black's pawns are weak. Thus, h4-h5 is essentially prophylaxis directed against ...c4 and ...f6.

There are now several such positions in the Winawer with h5 versus ...c4 (not all favourable for White; the assessment depends on concrete tactical considerations). Ironically, one of Black's plans when confronted with this squeeze is to play ...b5, ...a5 and ...b4, after preparation, advancing his pawns in front of his own king! But what is most interesting about this case is how long it took for White to accept h4-h5 as a legitimate plan not just associated

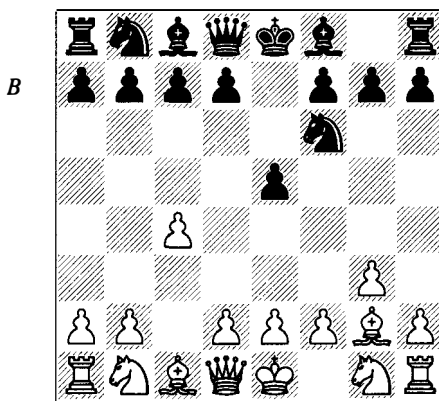
with direct attack; one feels that the strictures against moving pawns in front of one's king must have played some role in this reluctance.

Affording Common Courtesy to a Horse

Another of the old saws which infiltrated my young chess consciousness was "develop knights before bishops". I believe Lasker was fond of this one; of course, he may never have meant it to be more than a general guideline, but it turned out to be a usable rule in the classical openings. For example, in double e-pawn openings, you're likely to make that $\text{d}f3$ move before $\text{c}c4$ or $\text{c}b5$, and certainly $\text{c}c3$ tends to come before any false start by the queen's bishop. In the Queen's Gambit, moreover, we have both $\text{c}c3$ and $\text{d}f3$ before any bishop move in many lines (for example, in the Semi-Tarrasch, most Tarrasch QGDs, and almost all Slav Defences); and at least the queen's bishop is polite enough to wait for the b1-knight to get to c3 before dashing off to g5 in the orthodox Queen's Gambit Declined positions. Similarly, in the Queen's Gambit Accepted, $\text{d}f3$ and sometimes $\text{c}c3$ will generally precede $\text{c}xc4$. Finally, in the classical English Opening variation, $1\text{ c}4\text{ e}5$, the sequence $2\text{ d}c3\text{ d}f6\text{ 3 d}f3\text{ d}c6$ was for years the most popular sequence, whereas the main line of the Symmetrical Variation was $1\text{ c}4\text{ c}5\text{ 2 d}c3\text{ d}c6\text{ 3 d}f3$ (or $3\text{ g}3\text{ g}6\text{ 4 c}g2\text{ c}g7\text{ 5 d}f3\text{ d}f6$, etc.) $3...d}f6\text{ 4 g}3\text{ g}6\text{ 5 c}g2\text{ c}g7$.

These sorts of openings provided the training grounds for generations of players, and there arose the general feeling that the development of knights by principle preceded that of bishops. After all, we already know where the knights are going (f3 and c3, f6 and c6, right?), but the bishop has several options along its natural diagonal, so why tip your hand too early? But like so many rules, this one often fails in concrete situations. Modern chess is replete with bishop-before-knight developments, which simply take advantage of concrete positional considerations. Let's start with a couple in that same classical English Opening. After $1\text{ c}4\text{ e}5$, the innocent move $2\text{ d}c3$ can subject White to harassment by $...c}b4$ (e.g., after $2...d}f6\text{ 3 g}3\text{ c}b4$) or allow expansion in the centre (e.g.,

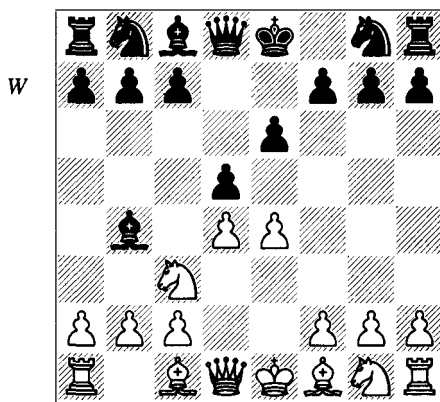
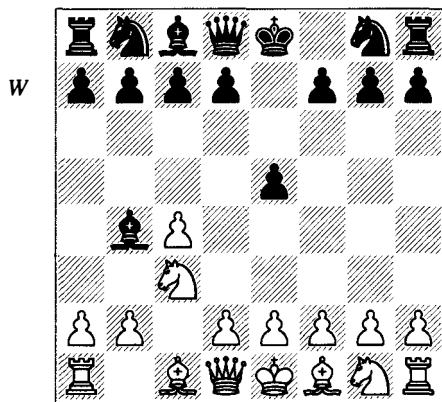
$2...d}f6\text{ 3 g}3\text{ c}6$, intending $4\text{ c}g2\text{ d}5$, and the tempo win by $...d}4$ will justify Black's play in several lines). And the other knight development, $2\text{ d}f3$, allows $2...e}4$. Even $2\text{ d}c3\text{ d}f6\text{ 3 d}f3\text{ d}c6\text{ 4 g}3\text{ c}b4$ or $4\text{ e}3\text{ c}b4$ forces White to consider when and whether $...c}xc3$ is going to be a threat. So a common modern alternative has been $2\text{ g}3$, e.g., $2...d}f6\text{ 3 c}g2\text{ (D)}$.



A case of bishops before knights, simply so that Black must commit before he knows where White's knights are going to be. Play often goes $3...c}6$ ($3...d}c6$, following the 'knights before bishops' rule, is actually considered inferior due to $4\text{ d}c3$, when $4...c}b4\text{ 5 d}d5!$ keeps a small, enduring advantage; again, I simply refer to the theory, rather than attributing this to any self-evident feature of the position) $4\text{ d}4\text{ exd}4\text{ 5 d}xd4\text{ d}5\text{ 6 d}f3$, and White would prefer to play $c}g5$ or $cx}d5$ and 0-0 next, rather than commit his other knight to c3 and subject it to harassment from $...c}5$ and $...d}4$.

This is a modest example, and $2\text{ g}3$ is by no means 'superior' to $2\text{ d}c3$; it is just a valid alternative. But along the same lines, Black has recently (beginning in the early 1980s) turned his attention to $2\text{ d}c3\text{ c}b4!$ (D).

By the time of this writing, there have been many hundreds of high-level games with this move, indicating that it is at least a certain credibility; but up to 1970, I can find only 4 such games, and by 1980, only 19 (and those by unknown players)! It's hard to believe that this doesn't to some extent reflect the ancient prejudice against bishops before knights. The repeated adoption of $2...c}b4$ by players such as Kramnik and Shirov shows what a conceptual



shift has taken place. First, if White plays a move such as 3 g3 or 3 e3, Black can capture on c3 and compromise White's pawns, securing plenty of play. Of course, White can gain a tempo for the moment by 3 Qd5; but it doesn't take much reflection to see that the knight on d5 will itself lose a tempo to ...c6, and in any case, it is a second move by the same piece in the opening and hardly the kind of development lead that inspires fear in the second player. In fact, after 3 Qd5, Black has played 3...Ba5, 3...Bc5, 3...Bd6, and even 3...Be7!?. This last move has intriguing modern aspects to it. Black voluntarily cedes the two bishops, because after Qxe7 (a move White has actually foregone in several games), Black can easily expand in the centre by ...f6 (or ...f5 first), ...0-0, ...c6, and ...d5. I must admit that at the current time, White seems to be keeping a small advantage in this line, but arguably no more than in many of the main 1 c4 e5 variations. At any rate, there is no *a priori* reason to reject ideas such as 2...Bb4.

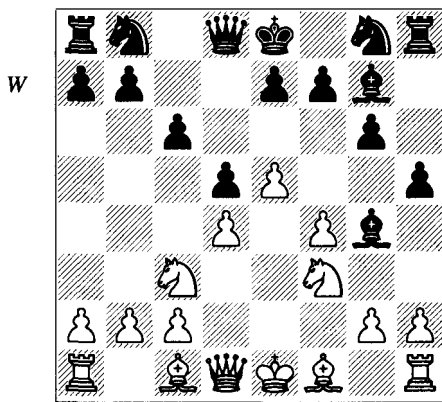
Let's consider some more examples. The reader is probably familiar with some major openings in which the bishop is developed first, for example, the French Defence, Winawer Variation: 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Qc3 Bb4 (D).

In this opening, Black very often continues to neglect the knights, a few examples being:

- 4 exd5 exd5 5 Qf3 Bg4.
- 4 e5 b6 5 a3 Bf8 (or 5...Bxc3+ followed by a quick ...Ba6) 6 Qf3 Ba6.
- 4 e5 c5 5 a3 Bxc3+ 6 bxc3 Bc7 and now 7 Qf3 b6 intending ...Ba6, or 7 Bg4 f5 8 Bh5+ g6 9 Bd1 Bd7, intending ...Ba4. In these two cases, Black has decided that resolving the

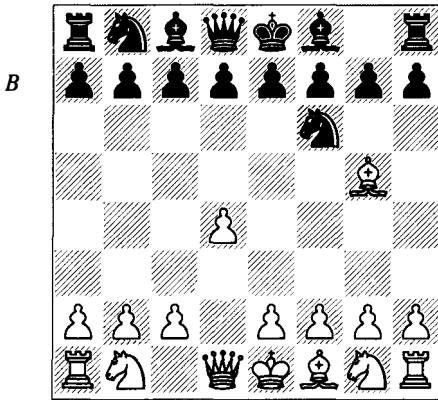
issue of his 'problem bishop' on c8 takes priority over developing his knights, which have decent prospects in such a position and need not be hurried to their destinations.

The Modern Defence, not surprisingly, offers us many examples of characteristically modern thinking. Here, too, the theme of 'bishops before knights' arises. After 1 e4 g6 2 d4 Bg7 3 Qc3, one example of this is Gurgendze's line 3...c6 4 f4 d5 5 e5 h5 6 Qf3 (against other moves, Black will normally play ...Bg4 or ...Bf5) 6...Bg4 (D).



Black has achieved his primary goal, to get his c8-bishop out in front of the pawn-chain. He plays ...e6 next, and often, the further bishop move ...Bf8 (to prepare ...c5) will occur before the best posts for both knights are decided upon. Another example after 3 Qc3 is 3...d6 4 f4 c6 5 Qf3 Bg4, and on his next move, having brought both bishops out before his knights, ...Bb6 will normally be preferred to any knight development.

Speaking of modern openings, how about 1 c4 e6 2 d4 b6, the English Defence? In many of the main lines, not only the c8-bishop but also the f8 one is developed before other pieces, e.g. 3 e4 ♘b7 4 ♖c3 ♙b4. And a truly modern opening is the Trompowsky Attack, all the rage and now well established as a solid system: 1 d4 ♖f6 2 ♙g5 (D).



Why commit the bishop so early, when it may be better-placed on f4 or b2, or even on its original square? Well for one thing, only by moving the bishop immediately to g5 does White force Black into making a committal decision with respect to his f6-knight. Clearly, if Black already had ...e6 in (e.g., 2 ♖f3 e6 3 ♙g5), the move ...h6 would be possible, putting the question to the bishop without allowing doubled pawns. Alternatively, ...♙e7 could be played. But with the precise Trompowsky order, moves such as 2...h6, 2...d6, 2...g6, and 2...d5 all allow ♙xf6, doubling Black's f-pawns, and 2...e6 allows White to trade his bishop for the centre by 3 e4 h6 4 ♙xf6, when

after 4...♗xf6 White can seek a more dynamic follow-up than 5 ♖f3. A natural alternative is 2...♖e4, when after 3 ♙h4 or 3 ♙f4, the knight on e4 will have to lose time to f3, with unclear consequences. (Here the almost too modern 3 h4!? is a whole other story, involving issues of the bishop-pair versus the open h-file and the cramping influence of White's g-pawn). The interesting thing, again, is how many years it took for this simple bishop-before-knight development to catch on. Similarly, there has been a lot of recent interest in the neglected opening 1 d4 d5 2 ♙g5. As in the Trompowsky, development of White's other bishop will often precede that of his knights, for example in the variations 2...g6 3 e3 ♙g7 4 c3 ♖d7 5 ♙d3 and 2...♖f6 3 ♙xf6 gxf6 4 c4 dxc4 5 e3 c5 6 ♙xc4.

In the chapters which follow, we will be addressing more rules and principles applying to specific pieces and formations. Traditional strictures against knights on the edge of the board, attacking the front of the pawn-chain, creating backward pawns on open files, ceding outposts, allowing doubled pawns, and the like, will be examined. Broader abstractions are even more vulnerable to criticism. The rule which states that 'a player with more space should avoid exchanges', for example, is so riddled with exceptions as to have lost its usefulness. I hope that this chapter has given a sense of the process by which the modern player has freed himself from the limitations of such rules, substituting a concrete and pragmatic assessment of the position at hand. This 'rule-independence' forms the basis for the discussion in succeeding chapters.

3 Modern Pawn Play

The subject of pawns in modern chess could easily fill a book or two. The theory of pawn structures, for example, has probably advanced more than any other area of the game over the last 60 years. Since it's impossible to be comprehensive, this chapter will focus on what I consider to be major changes in our conceptions of pawn play. In the last chapter, we touched upon one such change involving moving pawns in front of one's king. That is a matter of only limited application, although it casts some light on modern thinking. In this chapter, we move on to more basic issues which are fundamental to the way chess is played today. The core of the chapter will be concerned with pawn-chains, backward pawns, and pawn play on the flanks. Pawns are still the soul of modern chess, so new treatments in these areas and others are reflective of underlying philosophic trends. Furthermore, without a feel for modern pawn play, many of the changes described in succeeding chapters will be lacking in context.

New Treatments of the Pawn-chain

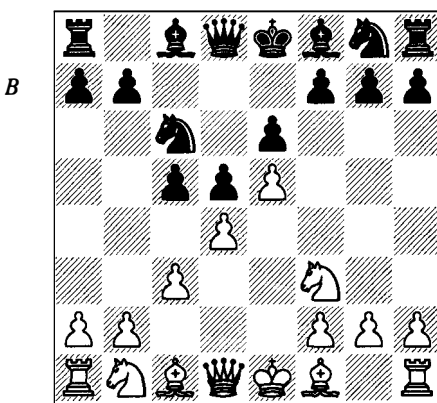
The treatment of pawn-chains has undergone radical change in recent years. We have already discussed the Nimzowitsch's views on pawn-chains (which really superseded all previous thought on the subject) and the modern evolution of his approach in Part 1, Chapter 4. We know that Nimzowitsch himself gave most of his attention to the Advance Variation of the French Defence (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5) in explicating his principles, although he also touched lightly upon a King's Indian-like structure (c4, d5, e4 and f3 vs c7, d6, e5 and f5). So it seems appropriate to begin with that same Advance Variation and associated French lines in which White plays e5.

Recall that one of Nimzowitsch's key insights (and the one most often stated as a principle in textbooks) is that one should attack the

base of the pawn-chain. He adduces a lengthy and compelling argument to that effect, spiced with his usual metaphorical wisdom, e.g.,

"...after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5, the black pawns (e6, d5) are cramped. The attack on the cramping white chain should, by our rule, be launched without any delay, by 3...c5 rather than 3...f6, for the white e-pawn corresponds to an architectural adornment to our building (the chain), whereas the white d-pawn is the very foundation of the whole structure. If we wish to destroy a building, we would not begin with its architectural ornaments, but we would blow up its foundations, for then the destruction of the ornaments with all the rest will follow automatically."

All very delightful, but one of the themes of this book is how deceptive such explanations can be. An alternative parable would be that the d4- and e5-pawns form a prison building, and the rebelling inmates (playing Black), try as they might, can't get past the guards who are wisely massed to guard the foundations of the building (d4). But they have stolen just enough explosives to take out the front gate (e5), after which they will flood from the prison into freedom (wreaking revenge upon the guards who are now outflanked, etc., etc.).



A few examples should help out. The above diagram arises after 3 e5 c5 4 c3 dxc6 5 dxf3,

when Black has indeed made a start by attacking the base at d4, but without 'blowing up the foundation' at all, he will then resort to ...f6 in a majority of modern lines.

Here, for example, are two of the main lines, with my comments focused on pawn-chain issues:

a) **5...♗d7**

A typically modern move popularized by Korchnoi. The essence of it is to wait to see where White's king's bishop is going before committing the black knight and queen. Thus, in terms we will discuss later, Black gets ahead in the information game.

6 a3

White prepares b4. The move 6 ♗e2 is also met by 6...f6 in most games.

6...f6

An effective move! The foundations at d4 are likely to be pretty secure after 7 b4, so let's wipe out that gate!

7 ♗d3

Trying to keep the prisoners in. They got out with a vengeance after 7 ♗f4 ♖b6 8 b4 cxd4 9 cxd4 g5! 10 ♗e3 g4 11 ♗fd2 fxe5 in Gramer-Djurhuus, Gausdal 1991, when it was too late to call in the National Guard.

7...♖c7

Also good are 7...fxe5 8 dxe5 ♖c7 9 ♗f4 0-0-0 10 ♗bd2 ♗h6!, S.Arkel-King, London 1989, and 7...cxd4 8 cxd4 ♗h6! intending ...♗f7, Jäckle-Sakaev, Dortmund 1992.

8 exf6?!

Freeing even the death-row inmates! But 8 0-0 0-0-0 9 ♗e1 c4 10 ♗f1 ♗ge7 intending ...♗g6 put great pressure on e5 in Genin-Epishin, Leningrad 1980.

8...♗xf6 9 0-0 c4 10 ♗c2 ♗d6 11 ♗e1 0-0-0 (D)

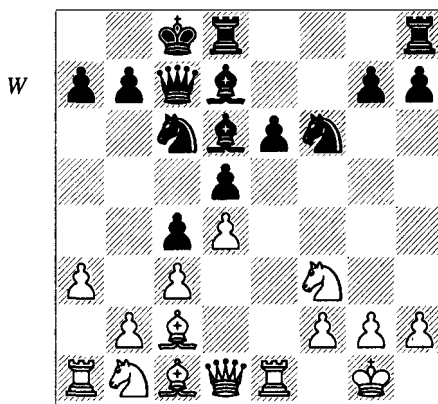
A common result of exchanging pawns on f6; instead of Nimzowitsch's hoped-for pressure against a backward e-pawn and powerful outpost on e5 calling the shots, Black's superior activity and development ensure him a lasting initiative.

12 ♖e2 ♗df8 13 ♗e5 ♗e8 14 f4 g5!

White doesn't have enough guards activated to cope with all the prisoners.

15 fxg5 ♗xe5 16 dxe5 ♗h5

Black was clearly better in Branford-Martin, Westergate 1992.



b) **5...♖b6**

The traditional main line.

6 ♗e2

Nimzowitsch actually played 6 ♗d3 cxd4 7 cxd4 ♗d7 8 ♗e2, losing an entire move. After 8...♗ge7 9 b3 ♗f5 10 ♗b2 ♗b4+ 11 ♗f1, his opponent, Tarrasch, played 11...♗e7 with a good game, but still more accurate would have been 11...0-0!, for example 12 a3 ♗e7, intending ...f6, when Black is better – compare the main line.

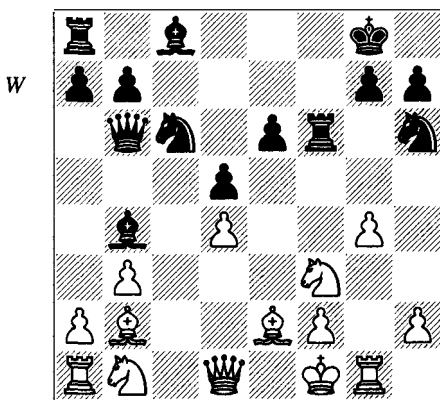
6...cxd4 7 cxd4 ♗h6 8 b3 ♗f5 9 ♗b2 ♗b4+ 10 ♗f1 0-0

So once again, d4 is impervious to further attack, but the attack against the front of the chain by ...f6 may even be more effective, since it opens lines against the king.

11 g4 ♗h6 12 ♗g1

Now Black could only dream of attacking the d4 base; but he still has the most principled solution, from a modern point of view:

12...f6! 13 exf6 ♗xf6! (D)



Doubly modern! Black not only values activity over pawn structure, but will sacrifice an exchange to achieve his positional goals – see Chapter 8.

14 g5 ♖xf3 15 ♙xf3

15 gxh6 ♜f7.

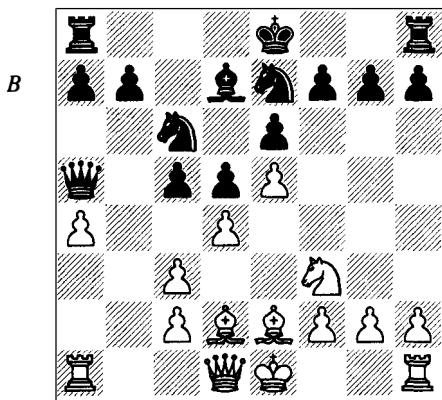
15...♙f5 16 ♜g4

Protect that foundation!

16...♙d7

Black intends things like ...♜f8 and either ...e5 or ...♙e8-h5, with terrific pressure. White has a loose kingside and a hard time developing, e.g., 17 ♖g2 ♜f8 18 ♜d3 ♙e8 19 ♙d2 ♙g6!, etc.

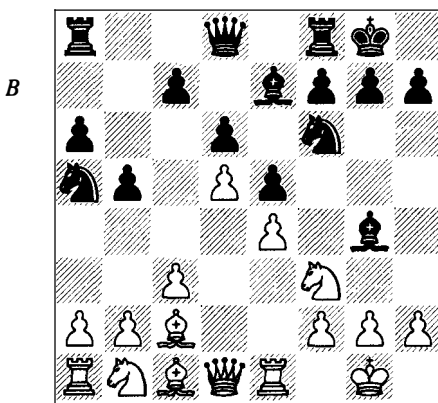
Before leaving the French, I should mention that in most of the variations in which White plays e5 (and not just the Advance Variation), ...f6 is a major idea. Certainly a prime example of that would be in the Positional Winawer. For years, White had good success in the variation 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♙c3 ♙b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♙xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♙e7 7 ♙f3 ♙d7 8 a4 ♜a5 9 ♙d2 ♙bc6 10 ♙e2 (D).



After 10...c4 11 ♙g5! the cramping pawn on e5 proved worthwhile indeed, since 11...f6? 12 ♙h5+! ♙g6 13 ♙xh7 ♖f7 14 ♙g5+! wins. Black's move 10...c4 releases the tension and costs a tempo, ideas not associated with the more dynamic modern Winawer. In fact, after the better 10...f6!, attacking the front of the pawn-chain, Black has done so well that White now tends to deviate earlier. His centre collapses, and if he tries 11 c4 ♜c7 12 cxd5 ♙xd5 13 c4 ♙de7 14 exf6 gxf6 15 ♙c3 0-0-0, Black's superior development more than outweighs the

two bishops (in fact, this is an example of how knights paired against bishops are often well-served by a quick opening of the position – see Chapter 7).

Now let's get away from Nimzowitsch's French Defence and look around with our newly-opened eyes at other pawn-chains. What do we see? Attacking the front of a pawn-chain is part and parcel of contemporary theory. How about the venerable Ruy Lopez? A simple and familiar example begins with the moves 1 e4 e5 2 ♙f3 ♙c6 3 ♙b5 a6 4 ♙a4 ♙f6 5 0-0 b5 6 ♙b3 ♙e7 7 ♜e1 0-0 8 c3 d6 9 d4 ♙g4 10 d5 ♙a5 11 ♙c2 (D).

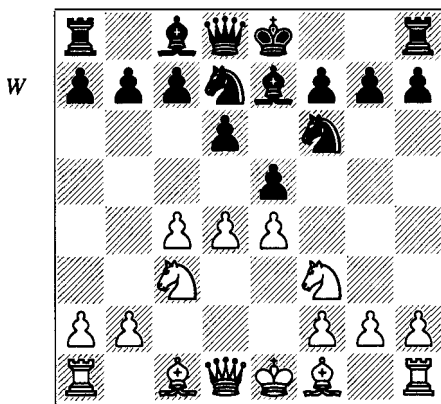


By the 'attack the base' principle, Black should be aiming for ...f5, e.g., after ...♙e8 or ...♙d7. As for White, some kind of build-up involving b3/c4/c5 might be indicated by pawn-chain theory, although this is admittedly rather unlikely. It is interesting to search databases for this position, which unfortunately did not arise a great deal before 1935. When it did, several players indeed played 11...♙d7 or 11...♙e8 and ...f5 next, but an equal number simply played 11...c6. Needless to say, White did not play for c5, but calmly transferred his queen's knight to the kingside by the standard ♙bd2-f1-e3/g3. Of course, there was little pawn-chain dogma to adhere to, since Nimzowitsch had not yet influenced generations of textbooks on the subject.

But today, and for at least 50 years, the overwhelming preference here has been 11...c6 (with a few players choosing 11...♜d7 or 11...♜c8, but following with ...c6 next); out of hundreds of games, the idea of preparing ...f5

just doesn't arise. Why is ...c6 effective? Because following 12 dxc6 (creating a backward pawn on an open file, analogous to exf6 in the French), Black's pieces can effectively work on the light squares and compensate for the d5 hole. White is not particularly well developed (see his queenside). After 12 dxc6, one option is simply 12...dxc6, and the reader may notice a remarkable resemblance to the Sveshnikov Sicilian(!), made starker if White plays g5 and Black breaks with ...b4. Traditionally more common has been 12 dxc6 ♖c7, after which Black plays ...♗xc6, puts a rook on d8, and then by either ...♙e6 or ...♙c8-b7 and ...♘c4-b6 genuinely contests the d5-square. To summarize, Black's active piece play provides a dynamic counterweight to White's control of d5, a square which is difficult to reinforce in practice.

Of course, the King's Indian Defence and its cousins, the Old Indian and Modern Defences, are the archetypal modern pawn-chain 1 d4 openings. Speaking of the Old Indian, let's take a look at a couple of typical variations involving d5 (and thus a pawn-chain) following 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 d6 3 ♘c3 e5 4 ♘f3 ♘bd7 5 e4 ♙e7 (D):



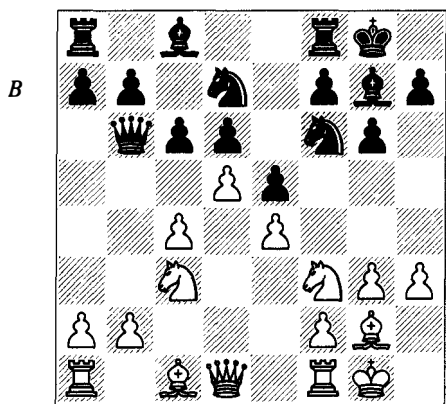
a) 6 g3 0-0 7 ♙g2 c6 8 0-0 a6 9 d5, and now Black foregoes, for example, 9...c5 followed by ...♗e8 and ...f5 (attacking the base) in favour of 9...cxd5 10 cxd5 b5, e.g., 11 ♖e1 ♘b6 12 ♘d3 ♙d7, when he is ready for ...a5 and ...b4, and has decided to challenge White on the very side where his enemy has a space advantage. This is a sound and pragmatic decision, which has proved to be far more realistic than weaker plans based upon ...f5.

b) 6 ♙e2 0-0 7 0-0 c6 8 d5, and again, Black best idea is to work on the queenside: 8...♘c5 9 ♗c2 a5 10 ♙e3 ♗c7 11 ♘d2 ♙d7 with unclear prospects.

One might say, 'of course' to these mini-examples; in fact, Black almost never seems to play for ...f5 versus d5 in variations of the Old Indian. But it's worth considering why that is. The relevant comparison is with the King's Indian Defence, where ...f5 is still the main idea in such positions. There, a bishop on g7 provides defence for the king after ...g6 and ...f5, particularly after exf5 is met by ...gxf5, the positionally most desirable recapture. But still more important, any breakdown of White's central pawn structure will free the often-lethal bishop on g7 (hence, the great number of ...e4 pawn sacrifices). By contrast, in the Old Indian, the great effort required to break down White's centre, if successful, still does little to activate the bishop on e7. Note that these general reasons I'm positing are hardly on the level of 'principles'. The pawn structure is the same in either case (assuming that Black plays ...g6 in the Old Indian, which is often a necessary prelude to ...f5 and paired with, say, ...♗e8-g7). But the structure itself does not dictate Black's correct pawn strategy, as we have seen. Rather, the difference in the position of one piece (Black's king's bishop) does.

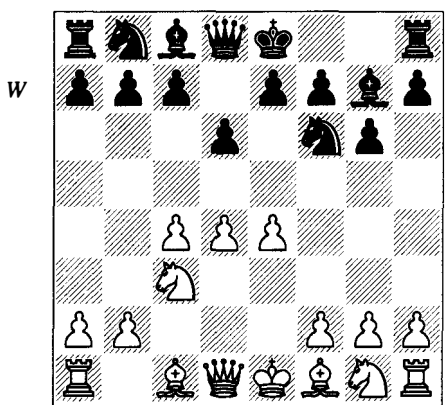
Let's take a look at pawn-chains in the King's Indian Defence itself. Here, naturally, ...f5 tends to be the main break against a c4/d5/e4 pawn structure, but increasingly, the move ...c6, attacking the front of the pawn-chain, proves more useful in certain lines. Let me just point out a few such cases. In the g3 fianchetto systems, the old main line is 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘f3 ♙g7 4 g3 0-0 5 ♙g2 d6 6 0-0 ♘bd7 7 ♘c3 e5 8 e4 c6 9 h3 ♗b6 10 d5 (D).

This is normally answered by 10...♘c5 11 ♗e1 cxd5 12 cxd5 ♙d7, with definite ideas of queenside pressure, perhaps by means of ...♗fc8, ...a5, ...♗d8 (or...♗a6), and ...b5-b4. The additional activity gained by quickly opening a file is one of the positive features involved in attacking the front of the pawn-chain. Here a typical continuation is 13 ♘d3 ♘xd3 14 ♗xd3 ♗fc8 15 ♗e2 a5 16 ♙e3 ♗b4! (16...♗a6 looks fine) 17 ♗fb1 a4 with unclear play (analysis in



ECO). The move ...f5 never came into the picture, although it still lurks in the background.

The traditional main lines with e4 also illustrate how attacks against the 'ornament' on d5 are competing with those against e4: 1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 (D).



a) First, here's an example from one of the h3 lines: 5 ♖f3 0-0 h3 e5 7 d5 ♖a6 8 ♗g5 c6, after which Black develops flexibly by moves like ...♗d7.

b) And one from the Averbakh Variation: 5 ♗e2 0-0 6 ♗g5 ♖a6 7 ♗d2 e5 8 d5 c6 9 ♗d3 ♖c5 10 ♗c2 a5 11 ♖ge2 cxd5 12 cxd5 (12 ♖xd5? ♖cxe4!) 12...♗d7 with the idea ...b5.

c) The Sämisch Variation with 5 f3 0-0 6 ♗e3 e5 7 d5 c6 is still going strong (it is the main line in ECO).

d) In the main Classical lines beginning with 5 ♖f3 0-0 6 ♗e2 e5 7 0-0, ...c6 ideas versus d5 are not only common in the 7...♖bd7 lines, but are also creeping into a great number

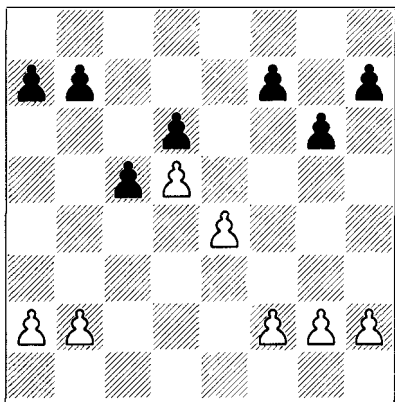
of the 7...♖c6 8 d5 ♖e7 main lines. For example, after 9 ♖d2, the move 9...c6 (or 9...a5 10 ♗b1 c6) is quite common. And in the Bayonet with 9 b4 ♖h5 10 g3, ...c6 is a frequently-seen idea, e.g., 10...f5 11 ♖g5 ♖f6 12 f3 c6. Of course there are many other examples as well.

The fact that such attacks against the front of the pawn-chain no longer surprise us (or even occur to us as a violation of principle) is the best indication that the most fundamental of all pawn-chain principles, attacking the base and not the front of the chain, is no longer a good guide.

As we approach the end of this section on pawn-chains, I want to make a few general observations. The 'rules' that apply to one pawn-chain are often irrelevant to another. In the King's Indian Defence, for example, after Black plays ...f5 and White plays exf5, recapturing with the bishop on f5 is sometimes a useful option, but mainly because the bishop supports the move ...e4, in turn freeing his g7 comrade. If White succeeds in maintaining a piece on e4 before ...e4 is possible, Black may wish that he had recaptured on f5 with the pawn. In the mirror-image French positions with white pawns on d4, e5, and f4, the move dxc5 can be risky after ...♗xc5, since the bishop hits e3 and f2 in conjunction with moves like ...♖e7-f5 or ...♖h6-g4 and ...♗b6. Here, the idea of ...d4 is not important. Another very simple contrast: in the main lines of the King's Indian, Black plays a classic 'break down the base' attack by ...f5-f4 and ...g5-g4, etc. But as Nimzowitsch points out, in the Advance French White seldom continues with f4-f5, but prefers piece play instead (e.g., ♗d3/♗g4/♖e2-f4 or some such), although f4-f5 is still a theme in the endgame. These decisions are pragmatic ones, based upon what works.

We haven't even talked yet about the type of pawn-chain whose front *can't* be attacked, for example a typical Modern Benoni structure with ...c5/...d6 versus e4/d5 (D):

Black's e-pawn has been exchanged, and is therefore unavailable for the frontal attack by ...e6. An interesting thing about such positions is the contrasting strategy of the two sides: White will often (but not always; see the next paragraph) pursue the traditional Nimzowitschian attack on the base; in the long run, f4



and e5 would be ideal. In practice, he first tries to restrain the black queenside majority by a4, and may tie Black to d6 by ♖f4 before he mobilizes his pawns, but e5 is still a long-term goal. Black, on the other hand, seldom plays for ...f5, attacking the white base, if only because e6 is likely to become a very serious weakness. Instead, he devotes his efforts to mobilizing his queenside pawns (...b5 and ...c4, with ...b4 and ...c3 if possible), in order to win space, activate his pieces and create a passed pawn on that side of the board.

But there is one more point to be made about the above structure (e4 and d5 versus ...c5 and ...d6): Black is often able to thwart White's plans for e5 by directing his pieces towards that square (a kind of 'prophylaxis', in the terms of Chapter 9); and yet White then successfully implements precisely what we've been discussing: he attacks the *front* of the pawn-chain by ♖b1 and b4. How does this work? Ideally, once b4 has been played, three things can happen:

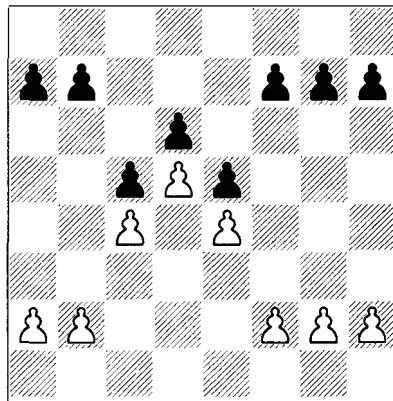
a) Black plays ...c4, ceding the d4 to a white minor piece such as a knight (hitting b5 and c6) or a bishop (neutralizing the g7-bishop and renewing the idea of f4 and e5);

b) In response to White's bxc5, Black plays ...dxc5. This is rare, because White's centre pawns are then unobstructed and mobile;

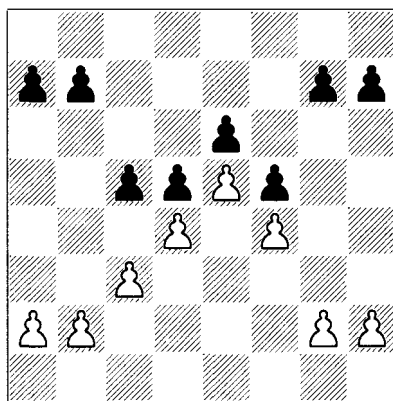
c) In response to White's bxc5, Black plays ...♘xc5. This again cedes the d4-square to a white minor piece, but such an operation must be well-timed, since the black knight on c5 can be very effective.

At any rate, the b4 attack on the front of the pawn-chain is a standard part of the modern arsenal.

We also haven't discussed other pawn-chain shapes such as the ...c5, ...d6, and ...e5 structure versus c4, d5, and e4, which characterizes the Czech Benoni and some King's Indians (D).



From Black's point of view, attack on the two bases by ...b5 and/or ...f5 is obviously indicated. But aside from the difficulty of achieving these breaks, this formation has some serious drawbacks. Namely, if White attacks the front of *both* chains, by b4 and f4, then assuming some concession by Black (for example ...exf4 or ...cxb4), the base at d6 lacks its residual protection (offered by c7 in a normal KID) and can easily fall. Compare the mirror-image French structure (d4/e5/f4 versus ...d5/...e6/...f5) (D):



In this particular case, a break by g4 tends to be more effective than one by c4, and Black's e6 seldom becomes a target, even if ...fxg4 has to be played. In fact, Black's position is so sound that White will often play exf6 e.p. against ...f5 in the French. There are endless

ramifications of these themes; the main point, as before, is that general rules are irrelevant to forming a strategy. Instead, concrete analysis and understanding of the nuances of the position at hand are required.

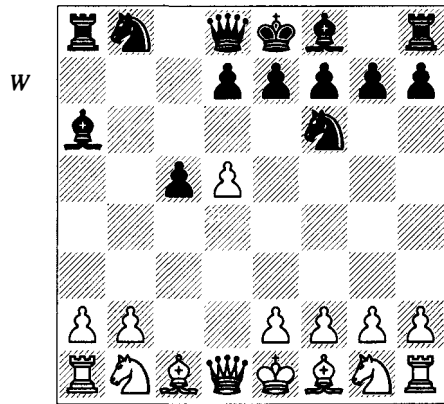
The Positional Pawn Sacrifice

Pawn sacrifices for positional goals (as opposed to direct attack) are so common in modern chess that one cannot even begin to do them justice. A veritable revolution in thinking is reflected in this one aspect of the game alone, and yet textbooks only lightly touch upon the subject. Let's see if we can begin to remedy that.

Of course, it is difficult to prove that the earlier masters lacked imagination in regard to positional sacrifices. After all, the nineteenth-century was known for chess which involved pitching pawns at the first opportunity. But those sacrifices were specifically designed to open lines and achieve immediate attacks; what we speak of here is the establishment of longer-term compensation in the form of some positional advantage (a great outpost square, two bishops, long-term pressure down a file, etc.). As for the early part of this century, the issue can only be resolved by a study of the games of Tarrasch, Lasker, Capablanca and the other top masters of their day. A number of modern techniques are missing from their play (witness the paucity of positional exchange sacrifices, for example); but one of the most extreme disparities arises in this area of the positional pawn sacrifice. As far as I can tell, Alekhine was the first to sacrifice pawns regularly for long-term compensation, although his inclinations were to do so for attack and initiative, somewhat as Kasparov is inclined to do today.

In contemporary chess, players have become expert at grabbing pawns and then suffering under the opponent's pressure until the time comes when they can present their bill and cash in. See, for example, my comments in Part 1, Chapter 2 on pawn-grabbing in the opening. Thus it is all the more impressive with what lack of guarantees the same players are willing to sacrifice a pawn for remarkably little immediate compensation. A simple example is the Benko/Volga Gambit (along with the host of related ...b5 sacrifices in various Queen's Pawn

openings). Let's talk about 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 (the Benko Gambit) 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 ♙xa6 (D).



On move *three*, Black (already a half-move behind, remember) hands White a pawn. The strange part, as any student of the Benko knows, is that he often doesn't begin to recover his material or even make concrete threats until 15-20 moves or more later! Stranger still, White has no weaknesses, just a passive outlook on the queenside in the face of Black's two semi-open files and the dangerous g7-bishop. We could talk about how this is possible for a long time, but two factors seem paramount to me:

a) It turns out that Black has superior development, in the broader sense that his minor pieces and rooks all can be transferred to effective posts; the same cannot be said for White, who finds it particularly awkward even to develop the queen's rook and bishop without creating weaknesses;

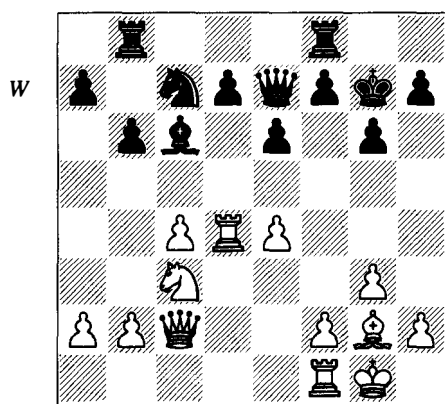
b) White's extra pawn resides in the two (a- and b-pawns) versus one (c-pawn) on the queenside. If either of these pawns were to move, quite serious weaknesses would be created, and Black's compensation as he swarms over the queenside would be obvious. But if the a- and b-pawns stay where they are, White's 'majority' is useless.

In fact, White already has a passed pawn, but this is a very interesting case of a modern principle pointed out by Suba: that an outside passed pawn tends to be a weakness in the middlegame (more on this later). Finally, very importantly, it is in the nature of the position that White's natural form of counterplay, attack

in the centre and on the kingside by e4-e5, is extremely difficult to achieve, is often pre-empted by ...e6, and in some cases, doesn't achieve much anyway. Of course, a pawn is a pawn, and White has developed a number of strategies to overcome these difficulties; but 3...b5 remains in the repertoire of several world-class players today.

With the thousands of wonderful examples of positional pawn sacrifices to choose from, I have decided to pick some classic examples (a few from times at which such sacrifices weren't so routine), and also ones which recur often enough that the reader may well be familiar with them. This will both emphasize the non-singularity of such sacrifices and cut down on the explanation necessary for the reader to understand them.

First, a non-thematic middlegame example from a world champion:



Botvinnik – Kan
USSR Ch, Moscow 1952

Euwe and Kramer remark: "In this position, nine out of ten players would move 19 ♖fd1, intensifying the pressure on the backward d-pawn. Botvinnik selects an entirely different method."

19 e5!!

This move threatens ♗e4 (or ♘xc6 and ♗e4), but it sacrifices a pawn:

19...♙c5 20 ♗d2 ♗xe5 21 ♘xc6 dxc6 22 ♖e1 ♗f5 23 g4!

The queen has to be driven to a square on which White's ♗e4 will come with tempo.

23...♗f3 24 ♖e3 ♗f6 25 ♖d7

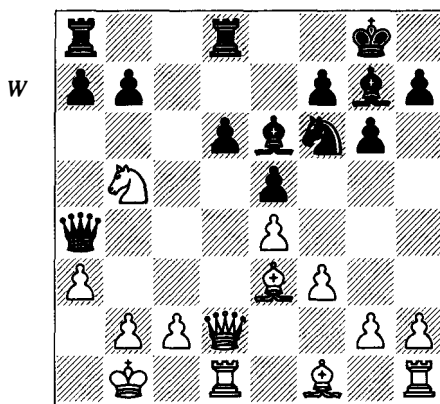
Here is the point. A rook on the seventh will not only create middlegame threats, but will win a number of endgames.

25...♖fd8 26 ♖ed3 ♖xd7 27 ♖xd7 ♗e8 28 ♗e4 ♗f3 29 ♗d4+ ♗g8 30 ♗g5 c5 31 ♗xf3 cxd4 32 b3

White has a large and probably decisive advantage, although Black should now have tried 32...♗f6! (instead of 32...♖c8?) 33 ♖xd4 ♖b7 34 ♗e5 g5 35 ♗g2 ♗f8 36 ♖d8+, when Euwe says "and Black cannot move a finger to help himself", but at least he could play on.

Of the old masters, perhaps only Alekhine (who was thoroughly modern in dynamic situations) could have been counted upon to play 19 e5 here, in my opinion. In modern times, one can imagine any number of players doing so, certainly champions like Tal, Fischer, and Kasparov; but also today's attacking players such as Shirov, Topalov, Polgar, and in fact, just about any of today's leading players.

A typical positional pawn sacrifice involves the occupation of a key central square. Shamkovich calls these 'blockading sacrifices' and offers this older (but modern!) example:



Boleslavsky – Lisitsyn
USSR Ch, Leningrad 1956

Boleslavsky, by the way, was one of the earliest and most imaginative proponents of modern pragmatism (consider his ...e5 move in the Sicilian, leaving the d-pawn backward on an open file, and his many ideas in the King's Indian Defence, just for starters). In the diagram, both Boleslavsky and Shamkovich missed that 15 ♗c7! (pointed out by Graham Burgess)

threatens ♖b5 and safely wins material. But in a way, this is lucky, because Boleslavsky treats us to a nice positional sacrifice instead:

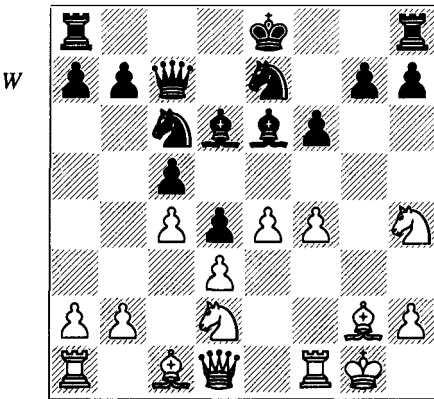
15 c4!? ♙xc4 16 ♘c3 ♜b3 17 ♙xc4 ♜xc4 18 ♙g5 ♜e6 19 ♙xf6 ♜xf6 20 ♘d5

White's knight is not only magnificently placed on d5, but it can't be challenged. Note the bad black bishop as well. The conclusion of the game demonstrates the power of one dominant piece:

20...♜h4 21 ♜e2 ♙f8 22 ♜f1 ♜ac8 23 g3 ♜g5 24 h4 ♜h6 25 g4 g5 26 hxg5 ♜xg5 27 ♜h5 ♜g6 28 g5 h6 29 ♜xh6! ♜xg5 30 ♜h5! 1-0

Since the h- and g-files will decide after ♜h1 and ♜g1.

A simple example, and not unique to modern times. However, a fair observer of the pre-1935 and current eras would have to admit how much more common such sacrifices for squares are today. Here's another Botvinnik example, a typical pawn sacrifice to secure superior piece play:



Botvinnik – Pomar
Varna Olympiad 1962

White had clearly already planned his next move:

12 e5! fxe5 13 f5 ♙f7 14 ♘e4

For a mere pawn, White has achieved a superb outpost on e4 and a devastating bishop on the long diagonal. Those two advantages are generally worth at least a pawn, but in addition, his c1-bishop has been liberated, and moves like f6 and ♜g4 are in the air. From Black's point of view, his d6-bishop is suddenly very bad, and his knights have few prospects.

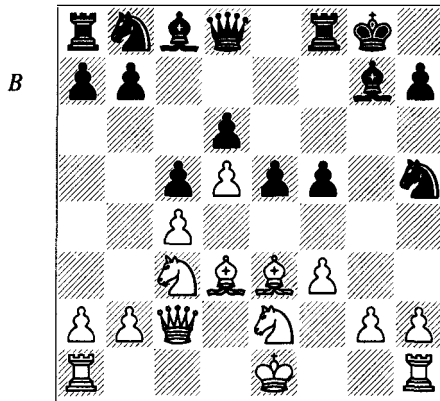
14...0-0-0 15 ♜g4

Shamkovich stops here and says that White has an overwhelming position, which is no overstatement, in my opinion. The game continued:

15...♙b8 16 ♜xg7 ♙h5

Now instead of 17 ♜f2?, both 17 ♘xd6 ♜xd6 18 f6 and 17 f6 were practically winning on the spot.

Sometimes the compensation is more long-term. Here's a slightly older example of the same sacrifice:



Kotov – Gligorić
Candidates tournament, Zurich 1953

The same position, but this time colours are reversed and so Black has one fewer piece out than White did in the previous example. And in fact, in all of these examples, it's interesting that several of the sacrificing player's pieces are not yet out! The point is that it's the e5-square and the respective mobility of both sides' pieces that count. At any rate, instead of a winning advantage, Gligorić obtained longer-term play:

11...e4! 12 fxe4 f4 13 ♙f2 ♘d7 14 ♘g1! ♜g5 15 ♙f1 ♘e5 16 ♘f3 ♜e7 17 ♘xe5 ♜xe5 18 0-0-0

The difference between this and the last example is clear: Black has no immediate attack. But he can prepare the break ...b5, whereas White lacks positive things to do (note especially his miserable light-squared bishop).

18...♘f6 19 h3 ♙d7 20 ♙d3 a6 21 ♘b1! f3!

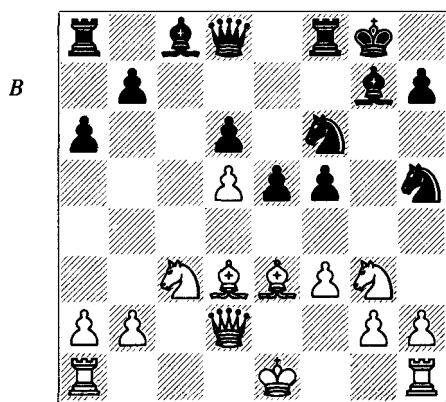
The reason I chose this example. After 21...b5 22 ♘d2 White would be ready for ♘f3 and would stand better. So again, Black gives

up a pawn to keep control of the dark-square complex:

22 gxf3 ♖h5 23 ♖d2 ♜f4 24 ♖f1 b5

White, utterly tied down, had to defend tenaciously for many moves. Black was better, despite the two-pawn deficit, a draw eventually resulting.

This manoeuvre (e5, meeting ...fxe5 by f5 or, from Black's point of view, ...e4, answering fxe4 with ...f4) has become so commonplace in modern times that to someone like Kasparov, it must seem as natural as recapturing a piece! In fact, he will play such ideas under less favourable circumstances:



Gheorghiu – Kasparov
Thessaloniki Olympiad 1988

15...e4!? 16 ♖xh5 ♖xh5 17 fxe4 f4 18 ♖f2

This time, there's no knight coming to e5, and White has more resources:

18...♙g4 19 h3!

A thematic subvariation is 19 ♖e2 ♖xe2! 20 ♜xe2 f3! 21 gxf3 ♖f4, sacrificing another pawn for more dark-square control. Kasparov then gives 22 ♜d2 ♖g2+ 23 ♜f1 ♖h4 24 ♖xh4 ♜xh4 25 ♜e2 ♜xf3! with an attack.

19...♙d7 20 0-0-0 ♖e5

Not as good a piece for e5 as a knight, perhaps, but still effective.

21 ♜b1 ♜f6 22 ♖e2 ♖g3

Black has a bind and compensation in the form of the powerful long diagonal. The further course of the game demonstrates his practical chances, although I think that it's only equal at this stage:

23 ♖xg3 fvg3 24 ♖f3 ♜ac8 25 ♖e2 ♜g6?!

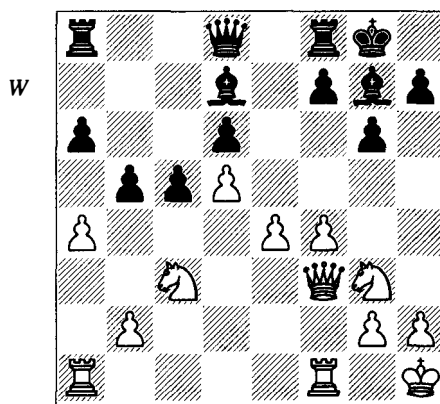
25...♜c5 would transpose to the game, without allowing White options on his 27th and 28th moves.

26 ♜c1 ♜xc1+ 27 ♜xc1?! ♜c8 28 ♜e3?! ♜f6 29 ♜d2 ♜c5!

Kasparov calls this clearly better for Black, but in fact 30 ♜c1 ♖xh3 31 ♜xc5 dxc5 32 ♜e3! would now maintain the balance.

30 ♖c1? ♖f4 31 ♜b4 ♖b5 32 ♖b3 ♖d3+ 33 ♜a1 ♜c2 34 ♜b1 ♖e5 35 ♖c1 ♖xb2+ 36 ♜xb2 ♜xb2+! 0-1

Kasparov has also employed a popular little transformation which is similar in spirit to the one above. That is e5, meeting ...dxe5 by f5, in Benoni and King's Indian positions (there's an example coming in a second). This is so standard now, especially in the so-called Taimanov Benoni (1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♖c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4 ♖g7 8 ♖b5+) and in the Benonis with ♖d3 and ♖ge2, that no one pays much notice. But such an idea was quite unknown in the 1920s or 1930s. It's rather interesting, in fact, to do a database search on this idea (using the ChessBase 'manoeuvre search'). The *first* example I can find (in a sound form) is from 1953(!):



Zagoriansky – Kasparian
Rostov-on-Don 1953

Black has just played 17...b5, but White crashes through:

18 e5! dxe5 19 f5! gxf5 20 ♖xf5 ♖xf5 21 ♜xf5 b4 22 ♖e4 f6 23 d6

White has an enormous positional advantage. The game concluded:

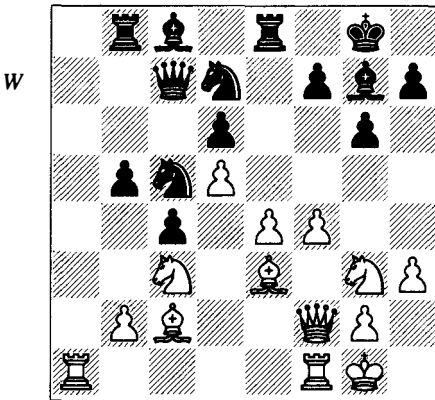
23...♖c8 24 ♜f1 ♜f7 25 ♜ac1 c4 26 ♜e6
 ♜d7 27 ♜d5 ♜xa4 28 d7 ♜d8 29 ♜xc4 ♜f8
 30 ♜c5 1-0

This form of sacrifice (for direct attack, it is true, but also for the goals of shutting out Black's king's bishop and gaining the key e4-square) really took off after the game Ojanen-Keres, Estonia-Finland match 1960, and after the following contest:

Penrose – Tal

Leipzig Olympiad 1960

1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♜c3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6
 6 e4 g6 7 ♜d3 ♜g7 8 ♜ge2 0-0 9 0-0 a6 10 a4
 ♜c7 11 h3 ♜bd7 12 f4 ♜e8 13 ♜g3 c4 14 ♜c2
 ♜c5 15 ♜f3 ♜fd7 16 ♜e3 b5 17 axb5 ♜b8 18
 ♜f2 axb5 (D)



19 e5! dxe5 20 f5! ♜b7 21 ♜ad1 ♜a8 22
 ♜ce4 ♜a4 23 ♜xa4 bxa4 24 fxg6 fxg6 25
 ♜f7+ ♜h8 26 ♜c5

...and the attack was too strong. To this day, White wins similar games in the same variation!

Nowadays, the e5/...dxe5/f5 sacrifice pops up in the strangest places, notably in the Sicilian and even in the Nimzo- and Queen's Indian. Here's a top-level example, with the e4-square again being critical:

Yusupov – Timman

Candidates match (game 5), Tilburg 1986

1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♜f3 b6 4 a3 c5 5 d5 ♜a6 6
 ♜c2 exd5 7 cxd5 g6 8 ♜c3 ♜g7 9 g3 0-0 10
 ♜g2 d6 11 0-0 ♜e8 12 ♜e1 ♜bd7 13 h3 ♜e5

14 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 15 e4 ♜e8 16 ♜e3 ♜d7 17 f4 c4
 18 e5! dxe5 19 d6 ♜c8 20 f5 ♜c5 21 ♜xc5!
 ♜xc5 22 ♜e4 ♜a5 23 g4 ♜d7 24 ♜ad1 ♜c8 25
 fxg6!? hxg6 26 ♜f2

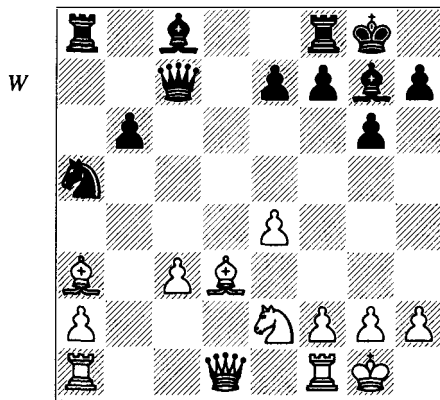
White intends ♜f6+ next; he went on to win.

Let's turn to another positional sacrifice which is now part and parcel of modern practice. In the Grünfeld Defence, there is a standard pawn sacrifice for open lines and light-square control on the queenside. Here's an early example:

Garcia Vera – Bolbochan

Mar del Plata 1952

1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♜c3 d5 4 cxd5 ♜xd5 5 e4
 ♜xc3 6 bxc3 ♜g7 7 ♜c4 0-0 8 ♜a3 b6 9 ♜e2
 ♜c6 10 0-0 ♜a5 11 ♜d3 c5! 12 dxc5 ♜c7 13
 cxb6 axb6 (D)

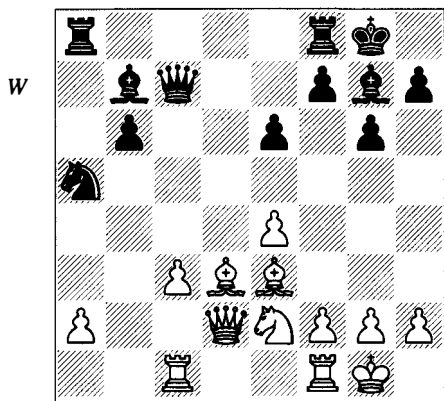


Black has compensation for the pawn due to his pressure down the open a- and c-files, and his control of the c4 (not only is ...♜c4 an idea, but ...♜e6 and ...♜fc8 is a common build-up).

Even easier for Black was a game a few years later: Sliwa-Pachman, Moscow 1956, which deviated from the game above on move 8: 8 ♜e2 ♜c6 9 0-0 b6 10 ♜b1 ♜b7 11 ♜a3 ♜a5 12 ♜b3 ♜d7 13 f4 c5! 14 dxc5 ♜fd8 15 ♜c2 ♜c7 16 ♜e1 ♜c4! 17 cxb6 axb6 18 ♜c1 ♜a3 19 ♜xa3 ♜xa3 20 e5 ♜xa2 21 ♜b3 ♜ad2 22 ♜f2 e6 23 ♜d1 ♜xd1 24 ♜xd1 g5 25 fxg5 ♜xe5 26 h4 ♜e3 27 ♜f1 ♜d2 28 ♜h1 ♜xd1 0-1. One feature of this type of position is noteworthy: in many queenside openings, ♜a3 by White is

ineffective due to ...c5 and ...b6, shutting out the bishop. Here, not only does Black give up a pawn, but he also frees the enemy bishop's diagonal. Of course, that piece turns out to be precariously placed on a3 due to the open a-file and ...d4.

Jumping into slightly more recent times, a positionally crisp example was seen in Pribyl-Uhlmann, Brno 1975 in the same line: 8 d2 dxc6 9 e3 b6 10 0-0 b7 11 c1 e6 12 d2 d4 13 d3 c5 14 dxc5 c7! 15 cxb6 axb6 (D).



16 b1 d4 17 dxc4 cxc4 18 b4 xa2 19 xa2 xa2 20 e1 c8 21 b6 a6! 22 d4 d3 23 h3 cxc3 24 f3 c8 25 e5 e2! with a large advantage.

Here's a similar idea in another variation:

Lautier – Ivanchuk
Terrassa 1991

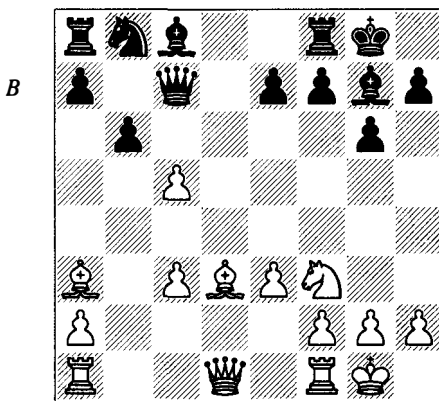
1 d4 f6 2 c4 g6 3 d3 d5 4 f3 g7 5 g5 e4 6 h4 dxc3 7 bxc3 dxc4 8 a4+ d7 9 xc4 b6 10 e3 a6 11 b3 xf1 12 xf1 0-0 13 e2 c5! 14 dxc5 a6! 15 h4 d1 c7 16 cxb6 axb6 17 a4? d5 18 b4 a5! 19 g3 e5! 20 d2 f8

Black is much better.

Nor are these dxc5/cxb6 pawn sacrifices limited to the Grünfeld Defence. A 'manoeuvre search' in ChessBase turns up a very large number of such sacrifices in a variety of openings. In the Symmetrical English, there is a Grünfeld-like line in which it is standard procedure, for example:

Furman – Timoshchenko
USSR 1977

1 f3 f6 2 c4 c5 3 d3 d5 4 cxd5 dxd5 5 d4 dxc3 6 bxc3 g6 7 e3 g7 8 d3 0-0 9 0-0 c7 10 a3 b6 11 dxc5 (D)



11... b7! 12 cxb6 axb6 13 b2

A miserable bishop!

13... d7 14 d4 e5 15 b3 e4 16 b5 d5 17 d4 f6 18 e2 d5 19 f3?

White is covering the queenside, sort of, but now the decisive blow comes on his kingside:

19... f3+! 20 gxf3 g5+ 21 f1 xh2

Black has a clear advantage – he gets his piece back after the forced 22 e1 exf3.

And the sacrifice in the following game is now just standard practice for Black in this opening:

Spasov – Vadasz
Subotica 1978

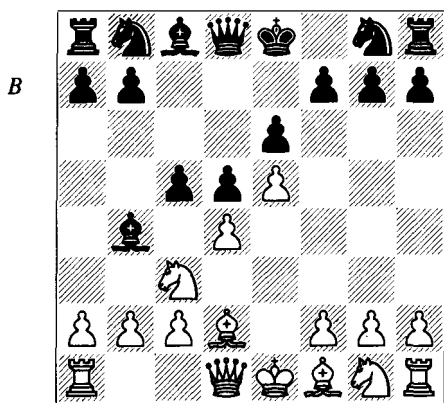
1 f3 f6 2 c4 c5 3 d3 d5 4 cxd5 dxd5 5 d4 dxc3 6 bxc3 g6 7 e3 g7 8 d3 0-0 9 0-0 d6 10 a3 b6! 11 e4 b7 12 dxc5 c7 13 c2 f8 14 b1 a5 15 cxb6 axb6 16 b7 xb7 17 b4 d4

Black has full compensation.

Also, various Nimzo-Indians, Queen's Indians, and French Defences have the same theme. Without going into much detail, I would point out that dxc5/cxb6 pawn sacrifice shows up in a variety of Frenches, e.g., in Positional Winawers following 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 d3 b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 xc3+ 6 bxc3 d7 7 a4 c7 8 f3 b6 9

♙b5+ ♙d7 10 ♙d3 ♚bc6 11 ♙a3, when Black will often give up the b- and c-pawns in return for the white d-pawn; and in similar lines like 7...♚bc6 8 ♚f3 ♙d7 9 ♙b5 ♚c7 10 0-0 b6 11 ♙a3 ♚a5 12 ♙xd7+ ♚xd7 13 dxc5 ♚c4 14 cxb6 axb6 15 ♙xe7 ♚xe7 with obvious compensation, Tseshkovsky-Gulko, USSR Ch, Moscow 1976.

A related idea occurs after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♚c3 ♙b4 4 e5 c5 5 ♙d2 (D).



Now, for example, 5...♚e7 6 ♚b5 ♙xd2+ 7 ♚xd2 0-0 8 dxc5 ♚bc6 9 ♚f3 b6 10 cxb6 ♚xb6, with compensation, was originally seen in Spassky-Bronstein, Moscow 1957; and the idea subsequently arose in a variety of similar situations. For example, I recently had a game in this line with 5...♚h6 6 a3 ♙a5 7 dxc5 ♙c7!? 8 f4 b6! 9 cxb6 ♙xb6 10 ♚f3 ♚g4 11 ♙b5+ ♙d7 12 ♙xd7+ ♚xd7 13 ♚e2 ♙f2+ 14 ♚f1 ♙b6 15 ♚d1 ♚c8 and Black had more than enough play (D.Fernandez-Watson, Chicago 1997).

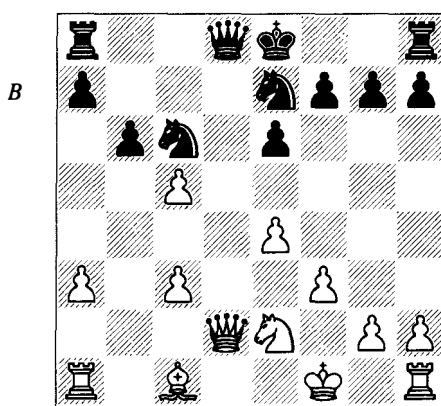
The 4 f3 Nimzo-Indian (and other variations of that opening) also illustrates this theme, e.g.:

Shirov – Karpov Biel 1992

1 d4 ♚f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♚c3 ♙b4 4 f3 d5 5 a3 ♙xc3+ 6 bxc3 c5 7 cxd5 ♚xd5 8 ♚d3 b6 9 e4 ♙a6 10 ♚d2 ♙xf1 11 ♚xf1 ♚e7 12 ♚e2

Instead, Arnason gives 12 dxc5 ♚d7!, intending 13 cxb6 axb6 with the now-familiar compensation.

12...♚bc6 13 dxc5 (D)



13...♚c7!

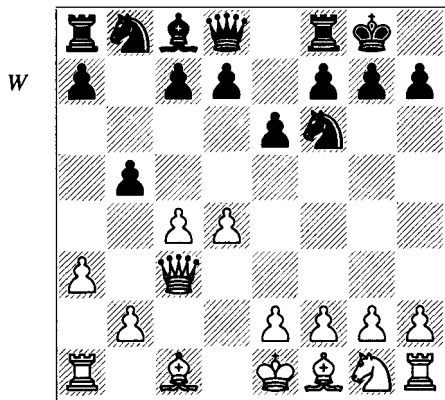
Here, since 14 cxb6 axb6 gives Black two open files versus enemy isolated pawns and beautiful squares for his knights (...♚a5-c4/b3 is an immediate consideration), Shirov declined the offer by 14 ♚f4 e5 15 ♚g4 0-0 16 ♚f2, only to accept under worse circumstances following 16...♚a5! 17 cxb6 ♚xb6+! 18 ♙e3 ♚c6! 19 ♚hd1 ♚c4 with tremendous pressure (if the bishop moves, ...♚b6+ and ...f5 can be murderous).

In view of the number of openings in which this sacrifice can arise, it is remarkable that a ChessBase search couldn't unearth a single example of it in play all the way up to 1935! (There was one lone consultation game with Alekhine as Black in which dxc5, cxb6 and ...axb6 occurred, but material remained even). One can hardly explain this without accepting that a fundamental conceptual change has come about since that time.

Sticking with 'standard' sacrifices for a moment, some of these positional pawn sacrifices are discovered in home analysis and then disputed for years over the board. Such is the case with lines like Polugaevsky's invention in the Queen's Indian: 1 d4 ♚f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♚f3 b6 4 g3 ♙b7 5 ♙g2 ♙e7 6 0-0 0-0 7 d5!? exd5 8 ♚h4 c6 9 cxd5 ♚xd5 10 ♚f5, with obscure complications which are still being debated nearly 20 years after its introduction. Although the creativity of such moves might be called into question by the fact that they are worked out at home, we can still see a very modern spirit here. After all, Black has no weaknesses and White has just given up a centre pawn! It just happens that his active pieces and the peculiarities of the

pawn structure give White a lot of play, a typical continuation being 10...♖c7 (10...♙c5 11 e4 ♗e7 12 ♖xg7! ♗xg7 13 b4! ♙xb4 14 ♗d4+ and 15 ♗xb4 with advantage to White was the original game, Polugaevsky-Korchnoi, Candidates match (game 12), Buenos Aires 1980) 11 ♖c3 d5 12 e4 ♙f6 13 ♙f4 ♙c8 14 g4 with unclear compensation, Kasparov-Karpov, World Ch match (game 2), Moscow 1984/5.

Space is lacking to do justice to the variety of modern pawn sacrifices. Sometimes these are based upon a combination of advantages (e.g., development and control of colour complexes) rather than upon direct attack or enemy weaknesses. Witness, for example, Adorjan's idea in the Nimzo-Indian: 1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♖c3 ♙b4 4 ♗c2 0-0 5 a3 ♙xc3+ 6 ♗xc3 b5!? (D).



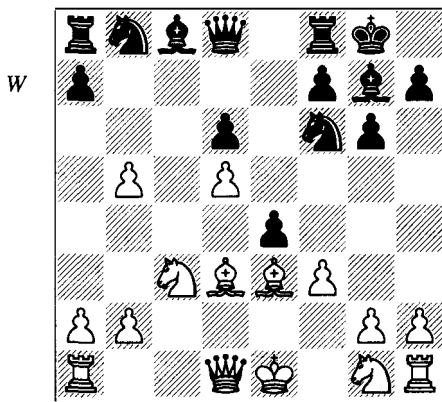
This is a sacrifice which not all masters fully trust, but is still scoring well at the time of writing. Again, White has no serious weaknesses; Black just wants to develop as rapidly as possible after 7 cxb5 c6. If White captures on c6, Black will take with the knight and quickly get a rook to the c-file. Note especially the light squares controlled by the knight on f6 and bishop on b7. In some cases, ...♖a5! will further target c4 and b3. This attempt to control a particular colour complex is quite typical of modern pawn sacrifices. Without going into the theory, an attempt to contest those light squares by 8 f3 is considered too slow, e.g., 8...♖d5 9 ♗d2 f5 10 ♖h3 cxb5 11 e3 ♖c6 12 ♙xb5 ♖a5 13 ♗d3 ♙b8 14 b4 ♙xb5! with scads of play, based upon 15 ♗xb5 ♖b3 16 ♙b1 ♗h4+! 17 ♖f2 ♖xc1 18 ♙xc1 ♖xe3 with ongoing attack, S.Mohr-Christiansen, Bundesliga 1989/90.

Every one of the world's top players today uses the positional pawn sacrifice. Garry Kasparov, true to his reputation, tends to impart them with an particular emphasis on activity. His sacrifices don't always lead to mating attacks or forced combinations, however. Often, compensation for the pawn will come in the form of a sustained initiative based upon superior overall piece placement. To conclude this section, let's see two Kasparov examples in which this initiative prevails even in positions without queens:

Timman – Kasparov

Reykjavik 1988

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 ♙g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 ♙e3 e5 7 d5 c6 8 ♙d3 b5 9 cxb5 cxd5 10 exd5 e4! (D)



Anything for activity! The e-file is opened and g7-bishop unleashed. Black is actually offering two pawns here.

11 ♖xe4

The reader will already recognize Black's ideas after 11 fxe4 ♖g4 12 ♗d2 f5 13 ♖f3 ♖xe3 14 ♗xe3 f4 15 ♗f2 ♖d7 16 0-0 ♖e5 17 ♖xe5 ♙xe5 'with compensation' (Kasparov); Black's e5 outpost, long diagonal, and mobile, dangerous kingside pawns (...g5-g4), combined with White's bad bishop on d3, promise nothing but suffering for the first player.

11...♖xd5 12 ♙g5 ♗a5+ 13 ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 14 ♙xd2 ♙xb2 15 ♙b1 ♙g7 16 ♖e2

Now we're in a queenless middlegame in which Black's queenside pieces haven't yet moved and his d6-pawn looks very vulnerable.

But positional pawn sacrifices are not limited to the opening:

16...♖d7! 17 ♖xd6?!

This is certainly hard to resist, but Kasparov preferred 17 ♖f2 ♖e5 with an unclear game.

17...♖c5 18 ♖c2 ♖e6 19 ♖e4 ♖ac8

Ever so slowly, Black's pieces take up more active posts than White's. Perhaps he is not clearly better yet, but the loose squares in White's camp (look at his third rank!) do not bode well.

20 0-0 ♖xe4 21 ♖xe4 f5 22 ♖d3?

Unfortunately, 22 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 23 ♖bc1 ♖xa2 24 ♖e3 will lead to a long, depressing defence against the two bishops. After 22 ♖d3?, Black's pieces begin to dominate completely. The rest of the game is fairly straightforward:

22...♖b6! 23 ♖c1 ♖fd8 24 ♖g5 ♖d7 25 ♖e1 ♖f7 26 ♖e2 h6! 27 ♖h4 ♖d5! 28 ♖d1?

But 28 b6! axb6 29 ♖b5 ♖dc7 still clearly favours Black.

28...♖d4+! 29 ♖f2 ♖xf2+ 30 ♖xf2 ♖c3 31 ♖b3 ♖xb3 32 ♖xb3 ♖d1+ 33 ♖xd1 ♖xd1

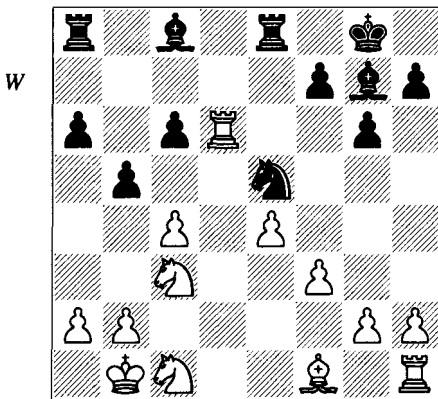
Black won shortly.

A similar combination of initiative and positional advantages was seen in the next example:

Shirov – Kasparov

Dortmund 1992

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 ♖g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 ♖e3 e5 7 ♖ge2 c6 8 ♖d2 ♖bd7 9 0-0-0 a6 10 ♖b1 b5 11 ♖c1 exd4 12 ♖xd4 ♖e8 13 ♖xf6 ♖xf6 14 ♖xd6 ♖xd6 15 ♖xd6 ♖e5 (D)



It's worth pausing here, to consider the nature of Black's compensation, consisting in large part of powerful bishops which will be posted on e6 and g7. Play continued...

16 f4?! ♖g4 17 e5 ♖f2! 18 ♖g1 ♖f5+ 19 ♖a1 b4! 20 ♖a4 f6! 21 e6 ♖xe6 22 ♖xe6 ♖xe6 23 ♖e2 f5! 24 ♖b3 ♖f7! 25 ♖a5 ♖d8!

...and the bishop-pair tends to win any ending which might develop. Thus, Black was clearly better at this point, and went on to win.

It is important to note that from move 15 onward, Black's conception depended upon a remarkable string of difficult tactics, since White has critical options on every move; see Kasparov's notes in *Informator 54* for the details. This is so very typical of the concrete, analytical approach Kasparov advocates. In most top-flight contemporary games, one cannot expect the game to be decided by one side achieving static, obvious advantages and then driving them home with good technique. Rather, one has to be able to anticipate correctly that, of the conflicting possibilities for both sides, the opponent's will fade and one's own will triumph. This is a matter of intuition to some extent, but more so, a matter of good preparation and superior over-the-board analysis.

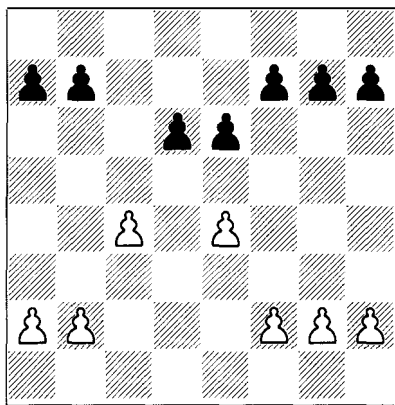
With this game, we end our discussion of the positional pawn sacrifice. But the chapters which follow will contain further examples of this integral part of modern chess.

Are Your Pawns Really Backward?

We next turn our attention to the subject of backward pawns on open files and the holes associated with them. Euwe/Kramer and Pachman have similar definitions of a backward pawn, the latter calling it "a pawn which has been left behind by neighbouring pawns and can no longer be supported by them." Euwe and Kramer say that such a pawn "is almost invariably a serious disadvantage. It is the square in front of the pawn which causes all the trouble", a revealing comment which serves to illustrate older attitudes on this subject; 'invariably' and 'serious' are rather strong terms, and I can't think that any modern master would agree with this statement. Pachman also simply assumes

that such pawns are bad, saying, e.g., “Here is a simple example of this: 1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♙c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♙xd4 ♙f6 5 ♙c3 e6 6 ♙db5 d6(?) 7 ♙f4! e5 8 ♙g5 and Black has a backward pawn.” This position, of course, is one of the most popular Sicilian Variations in today’s chess, used extensively by Kramnik as Black, for example. Times have changed!

There is another curious aspect of these authors’ presentation and that of most traditional middlegame books. Such books tend to be shamelessly imitative in their choice of subject matter, and for some reason, devote considerable attention to backward pawn structures such as ...d6/...e5 (without a black c-pawn, and with an open white d-file, as in several Sicilians like the Najdorf and Sveshnikov); but they spend little (or in some cases, no) time on the structures like ...d6/...e6 (also without a black c-pawn, and with an open d-file), which occurs in many Sicilian systems (Maroczy Bind, Scheveningen, etc.).

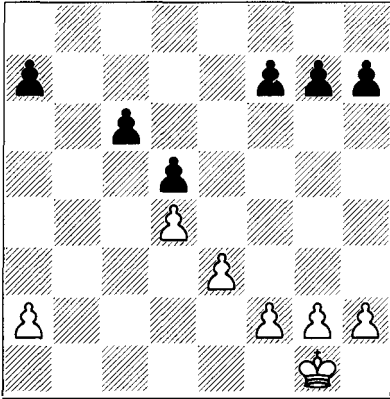


This extremely popular structure (the white c-pawn can be at c2 or c4) also arises in the various Hedgehog openings, and a similar one, ...c6/...d6 without a black e-pawn, occurs in the King’s Indian Defence and some double e-pawn openings. Euwe calls the d-pawn ‘semi-backward’ in such cases. This pawn configuration does not cede the square in front of the d6 weakness, and there is more potential of a freeing advance (...d5). Nevertheless, the d6-pawn is still a pawn on an open file, unsupported by its comrades on neighbouring files, and as such, its routine adoption in today’s chess deserves attention.

A little historical overview might be interesting here. I have run extensive searches for typical backward pawn structures in ChessBase. (For the record, these searches were conducted up to move 20, with the relevant pawn structure then required to stay intact for at least 8 half-moves.) Black’s ...d6/...e5 backward pawn (open c-file for Black, open d-file for White, as in the Sicilian) occurred in only 0.4% of the games between 1900 and 1935, many of those being ‘non-thematic’ cases (in a double e-pawn opening, for example, White captures a piece on d6 and Black responds ...cxd6). In the beginning years of what I call ‘modern’ chess, 1936-65, this percentage rises dramatically to 2.7%, and in succeeding years, rises to 3.25% (most of them Sicilians). That’s a hefty number of games in which Black is willing to take on an ‘almost invariably serious’ disadvantage! To cite another example, the figures for the analogous ...e6/...d5 structure (open f-file for Black, open e-file for White – a French Defence with exf6/...♗xf6, for example) are 0.32% for the 1900-1935 period (mostly non-thematic), rising to 0.77% today (practically all of them French Defences). There has been, then, an almost six-fold increase in Black’s willingness to take on one of these two structures.

A similar search for ...d6/...c6 structures (open black e-file, open white d-file) reveals that modern players enter such positions about twice as often as pre-1935 players, whereas the Sicilian ...d6/...e6 structure (open black c-file, open white d-file) is almost four times as frequent as in 1900-1935 (6.1% to 1.5%). Interestingly, Black’s results with this structure have always been better than his overall results: 51%-49% in White’s favour for 1900-1935 (with a relatively small sample), and 52%-48% in modern times. Thus, it appears that the d6 weakness is more than compensated for by other factors, a point Kasparov seems well aware of!

Finally, the traditional example of a truly problematic backward pawn, ...c6/...d5 with no b-pawn, and with White having a pawn on d4 and open c-file (arising from the Exchange Slav, Queen’s Gambit Exchange Variation after b4-b5 and b5xc6, and certain Tarrasch Queen’s Gambits, among others), has remained fairly constant in frequency of appearance since 1900-1935.



But the results are quite revealing: 50%-50% for 1900-1935 (with a small sample, however) and 56%-44% since then. Compare this with the 55%-45% for all games today! Thus, even with this most maligned of backward pawns (...c6/...d5 with an open white c-file and pawn on d4) Black doesn't seem to pay much of a price in results. If you include an advanced black b-pawn on b5 or b4 and a white pawn on b2, by the way, there are an increased number of modern occurrences, but the winning percentages remain the same.

The two indications we get from the above statistics are:

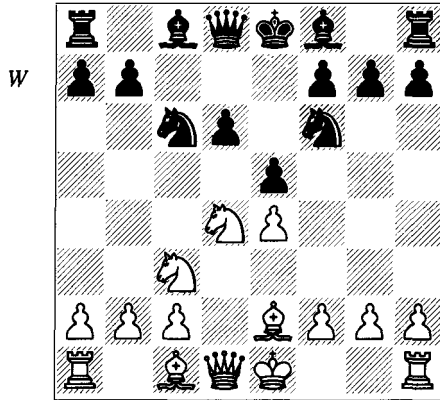
a) that modern players are more willing to take on backward pawns, although this mostly happens in particular openings with known characteristics;

b) backward pawns are in general less of a disadvantage than classical theory would imagine, and in some cases, no disadvantage at all.

Let's talk about why for a moment. To their credit, Euwe and Kramer acknowledged the changing times:

"In recent years, some opening lines have been developed (e.g., 1 e4 c5 2 d3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 dxd4 d6 5 d3 d6 6 e2 e5 (*D*)) which seem to laugh at all theory. Even the semi-backward pawn in the King's Indian (1 d4 d6 2 c4 g6 3 g3 g7 4 g2 0-0 5 d3 d6 6 e4 d6 7 d2 e5 8 0-0 exd4 9 dxd4 e8 10 h3 d5 11 c2 a5 12 e3 c6!) is enough to make certain theorists of yesterday turn in their graves ... this reappraisal of the backward pawn can be seen as one aspect of the new trend of thought which has been pervading chess since the Second World War ... a new dynamic style

has emerged, with the Russian school its chief advocates. This school puts the accent chiefly on the play of the pieces, their activity being sufficient to compensate for the weakness of the backward pawn."



Pachman, speaking of the first (diagrammed) example, lists the ideas behind 6...e5:

a) control of d4 and f4, including preventing White from occupying d4;

b) preventing the dangerous e5;

c) preparing a "speedy development (...e7, ...e6), and one, moreover, in which he has control of d5";

d) "Often [Black] succeeds in playing ...d5 ... If White seeks to prevent this, he must generally occupy the square d5 with a knight and, after Black exchanges the piece, retake with his e-pawn; the result is then a superiority on the kingside for Black..."

e) "It is interesting to note that Black's operations on the c-file are mostly more effective than White's on the d-file, for the pawn on d6 protected by the bishop is a great barrier for White."

With regard to this last point 'e', I should quote the ultra-modern rebel Suba: "bad bishops protect good pawns!" This is a rather shocking (if not universal) principle; in our Sicilian example, I might even modify the principle to "bad bishops protect bad pawns, but for good reasons!" More on this subject of bad bishops later.

Let's move to a few examples. I should say that the textbooks are very disappointing in this regard. They tend to show some thoroughly one-sided position with an unchallengeable

knight on d5 for White versus a backward d6-pawn; then, just to rub it in, Black usually has two other weaknesses or an exposed king, and no active play whatsoever! This is a good example of what Suba complains about when he says that “classical strategy presupposes that you play with much weaker (or much stronger!) opponents.” Real chess life requires more subtlety.

Let's look at a recent example of the one of the oldest ...e5 Sicilian lines:

Kasparov – Gelfand

Linares 1997

1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♙f6 5 ♙c3 a6 6 ♙e2 e5 7 ♙b3 ♙e7 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♙h1 b6!?

Gelfand's invention, and the latest wrinkle in this variation. Black's idea is that ...b5 allows a4, meeting ...b4 with ♘d5 in many lines, creating queenside weaknesses. Of course, ...b5 is still desirable, but Black wants to cover d5 first.

10 ♙g5

See Pachman's list above of Black's ideas in the ...d6/...e5 structure. If White plays slowly, Black can cover d5 and keep the advantages listed there. For example, Anand-Gelfand, Dos Hermanas 1997 continued 10 ♙e3 ♙b7 11 f3 b5 (a tempo down, but in a position where a knight on d5 can be exchanged to establish a kingside majority, à la Pachman) 12 a4 b4 13 ♘d5 ♘xd5 14 exd5 ♘d7 15 c3 bxc3 16 bxc3 ♙g5 17 ♙g1 ♙c7 18 c4 a5 19 ♘d2 f5 and Black had full equality.

With 10 ♙g5, Kasparov pursues a different idea.

10...♙b7 (D)

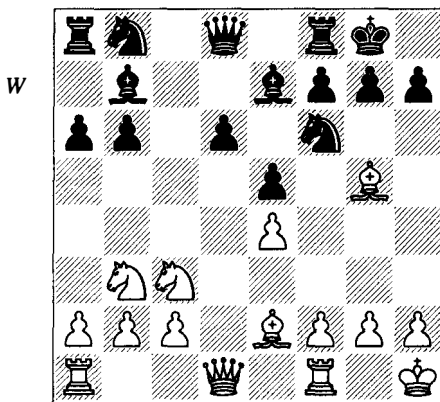
Notice that 10...♙bd7 allows 11 ♘d5 ♘xd5 12 ♙xd5, although this is only slightly better for White after 12...♙b8 13 ♙xe7 ♙xe7 14 ♙ad1 ♘f6 15 ♙xd6 ♙xd6 16 ♙xd6 ♘e4 17 ♙d5, etc.

11 ♙xf6

Kasparov pre-empts Black's strategy. He will establish himself on d5 by yielding the bishop-pair.

11...♙xf6 12 ♙c4 ♘c6 13 ♙d5 ♙c8 14 ♘d2 b5

Preventing ♘c4-e3. White is aiming everything at d5. Black's hopes rest with Pachman's



observations about his c-file and queenside prospects.

15 a3 ♙c7 16 ♘f3 ♙fd8 17 ♙d2 b4

Black adopts a course which leads to his own weaknesses on the queenside, but strengthens his control over d5.

18 axb4 ♘xb4 19 ♙b3 ♙c6 20 ♙fd1 a5 21 ♘e1 ♙a8 22 ♘d3 ♙b6 23 f3 h6

Allowing the following opposite-colour bishop situation, not a bad idea in view of the quality of his opponent.

24 ♘xb4 axb4 25 ♘d5 ♙xd5 26 ♙xd5 ♙a7 27 ♙xa7 ♙xa7 28 ♙c4 ♙b8 29 g3 ♙h7 30 ♙g2 ♙e3 31 ♙xd6 ♙c8!

Since 32 ♙xc8 ♙e2+ draws.

32 ♙f1 ♙d8 33 ♙xd8 ♙xd8 34 ♙xf7 ♙d2+ 35 ♙f2 ♙xf2+ 36 ♙xf2 ♙b6+ 37 ♙e2 ♙d4 38 c3 bxc3 39 b3 g5

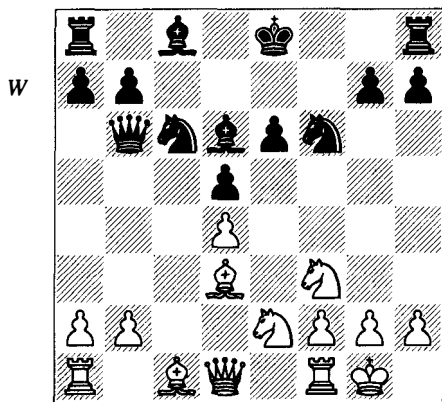
...and the game was quickly drawn.

This contest followed the overall outlines of many recent Sveshnikov Sicilian games, which features the same ...d6/...e5 structure. In those games, White achieves a slight positional edge, and Black sacrifices a pawn in order to trade into a drawn opposite-colour bishop ending. See any number of Kramnik Sveshnikov games for examples.

The analogous French Defence situation tends to be more dynamic, for example, after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘d2 ♘f6 4 e5 ♘fd7 5 ♙d3 c5 6 c3 ♘c6 7 ♘e2 ♙b6 8 ♘f3 cxd4 9 cxd4 f6 10 exf6 ♘xf6 11 0-0 ♙d6 (D).

Let's make a comparison with the ...d6/...e5 Sicilian line above, using Pachman's list:

a) The d5-pawn covers c4 and e4, similar to the role of the e5-pawn in the Sicilian version;



b) As opposed to the prevention of e5 in the Sicilian, prevention of the move d5 already occurred on move two!

c) The development ...d7/...d6 mirrors that of ...e7/...e6 in the Sicilian, and here, the control of e5 resembles control of d5 in that case;

d) Often Black succeeds in playing ...e5, freeing his game (for example, after 12 a3 0-0 13 b4 e5!), just as Black plays the freeing ...d5 in the Sicilian case. If White tries to prevent the advance ...e5 with dxe5, Black can often play ...d7, meeting dxe5 by ...d7 or ...g4 with a favourable change of pawn structure. In the Sicilian example, capture on d5 normally leads to a quick ...f5 and mobilization of Black's kingside majority; no analogous situation exists in the French. But it is also more difficult for White to play dxe5 at all, because his d-pawn tends to hang;

e) Here, attack on the f-file (achieved in one move after ...0-0, by the way) tends to be more effective than White's along the e-file, but for different reasons than in the ...d6/...e5 structure. For one thing, White's e1 would leave f2 dangerously weak (...g4 and ...e5 both emphasize this point), whereas defence of c2 was not a major issue in the Sicilian case. But the idea that the d7-bishop makes the e6-pawn a great barrier to White (as the e7-bishop and d6-pawn did in the Sicilian) really isn't as true here, because White can play c1 and d4-c5 (with or without b4) and put great pressure on Black's interior defences. As a result, the whole nature of Black's 'compensation' for his backward pawn is rather different here, depending upon the activity of his pieces. In fact, the bishop on

d7 will often abandon its post as the loyal guard to e6 and drift, via e8, to the kingside at g6 or h5. Let us now follow a thematic game:

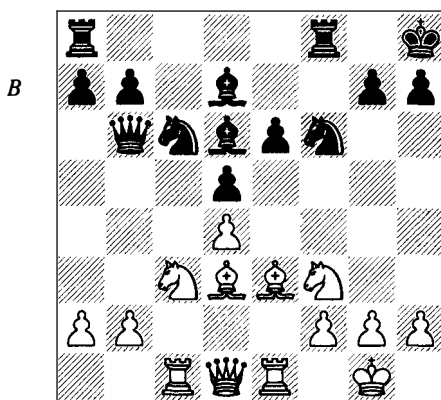
Lücke – Kindermann

Altensteig 1989

12 dxc3

To emphasize the point about the move e1 and the f-file, here's an example with White's next most popular move, 12 d2: 12...0-0 13 e3 d7 14 g3 f4 (to be able to answer dxe5 with ...dxe5 and not shut out this bishop) 15 e1!? (risky) 15...h8 16 c2 e8 (the d7-bishop here indeed plays the role of loyal defender of e6, as in the Sicilian situation) 17 b4 g4 18 d3 g6 19 h3? dxf2! 20 fxf2 e5, and Black's attack was overwhelming in Sulman-J.Watson, Lone Pine 1981.

12...0-0 13 e3 d7 14 e1 h8 15 c1 (D)



A good point to take stock. It's hard to argue with White's strategy. His pieces are all out, and his rooks have occupied the only open files. Black's next move emphasizes the difference between his backward pawn and the Sicilian d6-pawn. Instead of relying on Suba's 'bad bishops defend good pawns!', he prefers 'bad bishops are bad!' as a guiding principle, and decides to rectify that difficulty. In general, Black's play in this line is more directed towards attack and activity.

15...e8!

A more conservative and quite acceptable plan is ...e8 with the idea ...e7, and only then ...e8-h5. In the Sicilian structure, by the

way, this type of bishop transfer (...♗d8-b6 or some such) is practically unknown.

16 ♖g5

Eyeing e6; ...♗h5 would follow most other moves.

16...♗h5 17 f3 ♖ae8 18 g4 ♖f7

Back to the role of loyal guard! But White's kingside has been weakened, and Black is now mobilized. On 19 ♖xf7+ ♖xf7, Black's only problem piece would be gone, and he would be ready to attack along the f-file.

19 ♗d2 ♗g8 20 ♗b1 ♗d8

This prepares ...e5, which White can't do much to stop, now that f4 is unplayable.

21 ♖g2 a6 22 ♖e2 e5 23 dxe5 ♖xe5 24 b3 ♖c6

After 24...h6!, Black probably didn't like the look of 25 h4 hxg5 26 hxg5 ♖xf3 27 gxf6!, but then 27...♖h4+! retains a clear edge.

25 ♗c5 ♗xc5 26 ♖xc5 d4

White's weaknesses (especially e3) begin to look serious. But he has a nice tactical resource:

27 ♖f4! ♖xe1 28 ♗xe1 ♖xg4??

It was almost impossible to resist this, but 28...♗d6! would have kept Black's advantage, e.g., 29 ♖d3 ♖d5 30 ♖h1 ♗f6, avoiding any tricks. The rest of the game is marred by mistakes, but worth following:

29 ♗g3 ♖h6?

Black could hold the balance by 29...♗e7 30 ♖g6+! hxg6 31 ♗xg4 ♗e2+ etc.; but he wants more.

30 ♖ge6 ♗xe6 31 ♖xe6 ♗e7 32 ♖xf8 ♗xc5 33 ♖g6+??

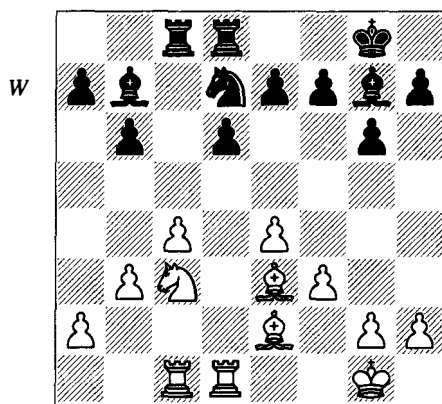
Of course, 33 ♗xg7+! would have given White a clear advantage, but who knows what the time situation was? After the text, Black was winning again:

33...♖g8 34 ♖f4 ♗e5 35 ♗e4 ♖f5 36 ♗d5+ ♖h8 37 ♖g6+ hxg6 38 ♗h3+ ♖h6 39 ♗c8+ ♖h7 0-1

The reader might want to compare this game with the many other French Defence variations in which White plays exf6 following ...f6.

Turning to 'semi-backward' pawns, we find that modern chess is riddled with these, mainly stemming from the Sicilian Defence (...d6/...e6). Since even club players are rather overexposed to the themes of Kasparov's favourite opening set-up, I'd like to investigate some very similar

Hedgehog positions instead. But first, let's look at a skeletal position:



I have intentionally left the queens and two knights off, although normally they would still be on the board. A traditional discussion of this position would (a) conclude that White was better due to his space advantage, and (b) suggest that White should play ♖d5, to exert uncomfortable pressure on Black. Then, if Black plays ...e6 to drive away the knight, the return of the knight to c3 is said to give White the advantage due to the weakness on d6. In some Sicilian Defences, this sort of manoeuvre would also be recommended in a position with only White's e-pawn on e4, and the other pawns on their original squares.

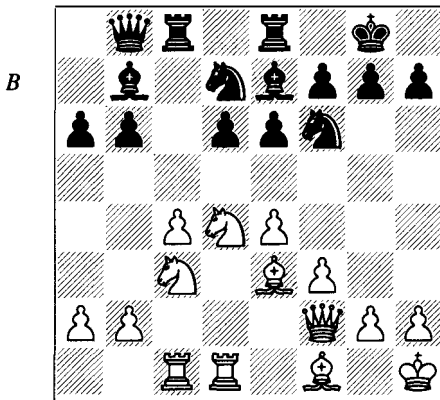
In modern chess, however, we often find that Black has voluntarily placed his pawns on e6 and d6 in such positions, without any time-consuming provocation by White! To make this tempo comparison worse, Black often begins with the king's bishop on e7, then plays ...0-0, ...♖e8, ...♗f8, and sometimes can even afford the further luxury of ...g6 and ...♗g7! In the Sicilian, this type of set-up arises in the Kan (1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 a6) and Taimanov (1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖c6) variations, or in certain Scheveningen lines. But it is the Symmetrical English opening which has given rise to the purest Hedgehog positions most often, via 1 c4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♖f6, and now, for example, 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 b6 5 ♖c3 ♗b7 or, more frequently, via 3 g3 b6 4 ♗g2 ♗b7 5 0-0 e6 6 ♖c3 ♗e7 7 d4 cxd4 8 ♗xd4 d6 (or some variant thereof). Here's an example of the former:

Taimanov – Yusupov*Kislovodsk 1982*

1 c4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 b6 5 ♘c3
 ♗b7 6 f3 d6 7 e4 e6 8 ♙e3 ♙e7 9 ♙e2 0-0 10
 0-0 ♖bd7 11 ♗d2

If White tries a reorganization along the lines of his play versus the Taimanov Sicilian, 11 ♖db5 ♗b8 12 ♙c1 a6 13 ♖a3 ♙e8 14 ♗b3, he runs smack into the dynamic potential of Black's position: 14...d5! 15 exd5 ♙d6! 16 h3 exd5 17 ♙f2 d4! 18 ♙xd4 ♖h5 19 ♙f2 ♖f4 20 ♙fel ♙e6 21 ♖e4 ♙g6 with an overwhelming attack, K.Grigorian-Psakhis, Frunze 1979.

11...a6 12 ♙fd1 ♙c8 13 ♙ac1 ♗c7 14 ♙f1
 ♗b8 15 ♗f2 ♙fe8 16 ♖h1 (D)



White has succeeded in suppressing both of the breaks ...b5 and ...d5, but it doesn't seem to be doing him much good. Suba talks about this as the problem of a 'good position which can't be improved' versus 'a bad position that can be substantially improved'. White's pieces are in a sense ideally placed, preventing Black's counterplay and 'fixing' the weaknesses on b6 and d6, but almost any committal move he makes (b4, ♖c2, ♖b3) allows Black to free his game. For his part, Black is stuck on the first three ranks, but has continuous threats of breaking out with advantage via ...b5 or ...d5, and lacking those, can proceed to improve the position of his pieces. If White tries, for example, 16 ♖c2, Black can continue as in the game, or play 16...♙f8 17 b3 b5 with equality.

16...♙d8!?

A creative strategy, designed to harass the white kingside by ...♙c7 (threatening ...d5) and

at the same time protecting the two weaknesses on b6 and d6. Also playable was 16...♙f8.

17 ♖b3?!

How should White make progress? It would be nice to reorganize by b4 and ♖b3, but 17 b4?! ♖e5 18 ♖a4 d5! is too strong. A wonderfully modern example of Black's dynamism was K.Grigorian-Agzamov, Cheliabinsk 1981: 17 b3 ♙c7 18 ♗h4 ♖e5 19 ♗h3 ♖g6 20 ♙g5 ♙d8 21 ♙e1 ♙c5! 22 ♙d2 ♙h5 23 ♗g3 ♙c7 24 f4 e5! 25 fxe5 d5! 26 exd5 ♙exe5 27 h3 ♙xd5 and there was no defence, since not only is d4 attacked, but ...♙xh3+ will be possible if the queen strays too far.

There are two things I like about this example:

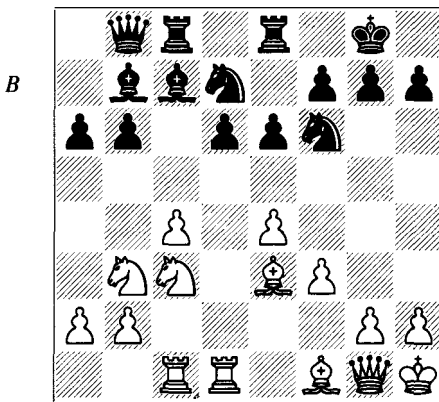
a) White has no weaknesses, and steadfastly refuses to make any (e.g. g3 or h3), and yet his opponent, operating from far away on the other side of the board on his first two ranks(!), created enough threats to break down White's position anyway;

b) the remarkable manoeuvre ...♙c8-c5-h5 is a great example of the modern rook-lift, as discussed Part 1.

I cannot emphasize enough how utterly bizarre such a game would have looked to the top players at the beginning of this century.

17...♙c7 18 ♗g1 (D)

Again, refusing to accede to weaknesses along either long diagonal, as would result from 18 h3 or 18 g3.



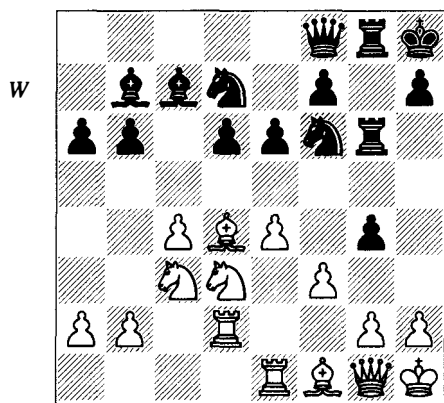
How can Black now proceed?

18...♖h8! 19 ♙c2 ♙g8!

In the Agzamov game, Black managed to activate a rook by ...♙c5-h5. Here, he wants to

achieve the same thing by ...g5-g4 (with ...h5 if necessary, to counter White's g4). This works to perfection in the game.

20 ♖cd2 g5 21 ♙d4 ♜g6 22 ♜c1 ♜cg8 23 ♜d3 ♜f8 24 ♜e1 g4 (D)



Precise timing, since now 25 f4 g3 26 h3 e5 wins the e-pawn. So White has to allow the opening of the g-file.

25 f4 g3 26 ♙e3 ♜xg4 27 ♜d5 ♙d8 28 ♜f2 ♙h4 29 ♜e2 ♜xe3 30 ♜xe3 ♙xf2 31 ♜xf2 ♙xe4

Winning a pawn and the game. The rest is just a matter of directing all of Black's forces against the king:

32 ♜f5 ♜c5 33 ♜g3 ♙a8 34 ♜d1 ♜e6 35 ♜xb6 ♜f4 36 ♜f2 ♙h6 37 ♜g1 ♙h4 38 ♜b3 ♜h6 39 ♙xf4 exf4 40 ♜c3+ f6 41 ♜f5 ♜xg2+ 42 ♙xg2 ♙xh2+ 0-1

It is easy to forget that, up to at least the 1970s, such bind positions with pawns on c4 and e4 versus the weakie on d6 were considered clearly better for White. Books would give examples of classic victories by the greats (Botvinnik and Smyslov in particular) to drive this lesson home. To quote from my own English Opening book: "White's strategy in these circumstances was supposed to be straightforward: establish a bind on Black's two freeing moves, ...b5 and ...d5. With more space to work with, White could more rapidly shift his forces from one side to another, eventually forcing new weaknesses or material gain." But (as it turned out) the difficulty in shifting those forces without allowing a black freeing move leads to the situation described below the last diagram, in which White is as much tied up by

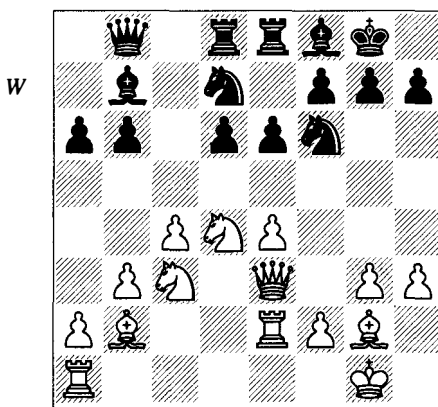
Black's latent activity as Black is tied up by White's space advantage! Thus, due to the special insight of a few players (Andersson, Karpov, Psakhis, and leading Hungarian players, for example), the Hedgehog became a standard and legitimate part of modern opening theory. In fact, in modern practice White tends to avoid the advance e4 in such positions, in favour of piece play.

To complete our backward pawn discussion, here's a 'pure' Hedgehog from the fairly early days. It involves a positional pawn sacrifice for play on the dark squares.

Uhlmann – Adorjan

Budapest 1982

1 c4 c5 2 ♜f3 ♜f6 3 ♜c3 e6 4 g3 b6 5 ♙g2 ♙b7 6 d4 cxd4 7 ♜xd4 d6 8 0-0 ♙e7 9 e4 a6 10 ♜e3 ♜c7 11 b3 ♜bd7 12 ♙b2 0-0 13 ♜d4 ♜fe8 14 ♜fe1 ♙f8 15 h3 ♜ad8 16 ♜e2 ♜b8 (D)



17 ♜ae1 g6

The most aggressive reorganization, mentioned above; Black actually takes the best defender away from the d-pawn for the sake of activity.

18 ♜d2 ♜c5 19 ♜d1 ♜a8 20 ♜c2 ♙g7 21 ♙a1 h5!?

The pawn sacrifice.

22 b4 ♜cd7 23 ♜xd6

Else ...♜e5 and the c4-pawn will be too weak.

23...h4! 24 g4 ♜c5 25 ♜xb6 ♜d3 26 ♜e3

26 ♜d1 ♜f4 27 ♜ed2 ♜xd2 28 ♜xd2 ♜xe4 29 ♜xe4 ♙xe4 with an attack.

26...♖xe1 27 ♖xe1?

27 ♖xe1 ♜d7 28 f4 g5! would be unclear.

27...♜d7 28 ♖f3

28 f4? ♜b6!.

28...♜e5?

Adorjan gives 28...a5! 29 b5 ♖c8 30 ♜d2 ♜e5.

29 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 30 ♖e1 ♜d4 31 ♖g5 ♖b8! 32 ♜e2

32 ♖xh4 ♖e5 33 ♖c1 g5 34 ♖h5 ♜g7! and ...♜h8 is threatened.

32...♜xa1 33 ♖xa1 ♖d6 34 ♜f4 ♖d2 35 ♖f6 ♖d4 36 ♖xd4 ♖xd4 37 ♖c1 ♖c8 38 ♜f1 ♜xe4

...and Black went on to win.

The New Relationship of Flank to Centre

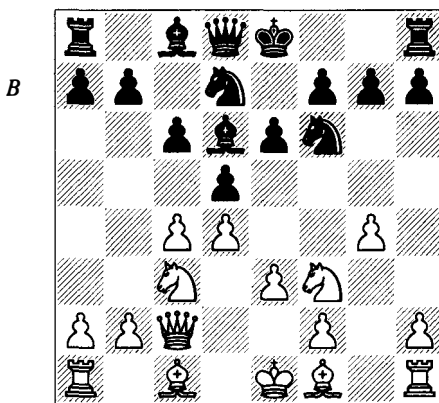
This is a broad topic which I will only touch upon here, but should be implicit in the chapters which follow. Traditionally, one of the firmest principles of chess has been that flank attacks are to be countered by attacks in the centre. Furthermore, launching a flank attack before stabilizing the central situation has been considered a cardinal chess sin, partaken of only by beginners. Related to this is another idea, expressed by Nimzowitsch as follows:

“... pawn moves are only admissible in the development stage when they either help to occupy the centre, or stand in logical connection with its occupation; that is to say, a pawn move which protects its own or attacks the enemy centre ... it follows that moves of the flank pawns must be regarded as loss of time; with this qualification, that in closed games the rule applies only to a limited extent ... Hence, as Lasker truly observes [in the context of open games, to be sure – JW]: in the opening, one or two pawn moves, not more.”

These principles have been considerably relaxed in modern times. Without going into great detail, I would like to point out a few examples of the type of flank play which does not depend upon complete development or an exceptionally stable centre. To address Nimzowitsch's statement, let's examine some flank advances in the opening, taken from recent play. On the kingside, the moves g4 and h4 (and

...g5 and ...h5) are seen in a variety of modern contexts. Here's an invention by Shabalov which has captured the attention of leading grandmasters (and continues to be played after years of analysis):

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♜c3 ♜f6 4 e3 e6 5 ♜f3 ♜bd7 6 ♖c2 ♜d6 7 g4!? (D)



It only took 70 years or so to discover this move! The tactical point is that 7...♜xg4 8 ♖g1 either recovers the pawn or leads to a terrific attack. The positional one is either to drive the f6-knight away, and then play for e4, or to force some kind of weakening such as ...h6 on Black's part. Then White can castle queenside and attack the weakness. Black has several replies, but a popular and logical one is...

7...h6

Now if g5 is ever played, Black gets the h-file. In the meantime, he reasons that the g4-pawn sticks out like a sore thumb.

8 ♜d2

We shall now follow a game where Black tried a classical response to White's idea:

Krivoshei – Feigin
Ukrainian Ch 1995

8...e5?!

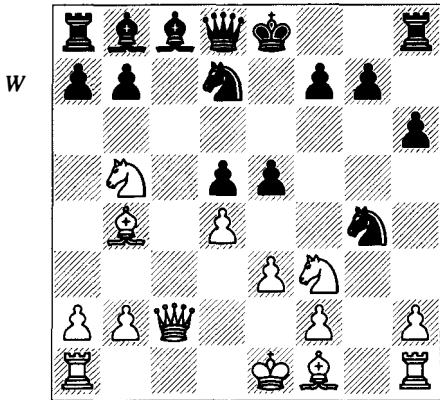
Better is 8...♖e7 or 8...dxc4, but I want to look at this move. After all, aren't flank attacks supposed to be met by counterattacks in the centre?

9 cxd5 cxd5

Perhaps 9...♜xd5 was better, but after 10 0-0-0, White keeps alive his options of e4, ♜e4 or in some cases ♜xd5, with good prospects.

10 ♖b5 ♙b8 11 ♙b4 ♖xg4 (D)

Black cannot close the centre by 11...e4 due to 12 ♖c1!, so he tries to grab material and gain some room. But after White's reply, a retreat is also met by 13 ♖c1.



12 h3! e4 13 hxg4 exf3 14 ♖h5!! g5

Knight moves lose to the exchange sacrifice on e5, e.g., 14...♖b6 15 ♖e5+ ♙xe5 16 dxe5, winning.

15 ♖c1 ♖b6 16 ♖c5!

Threatening ♖xh6, and 16...♖f6 fails to 17 ♖xa7! ♙xa7 18 ♖xh6! ♖xh6 19 ♙b5+ ♙d7 20 ♖f8#.

16...♙e6 17 ♖xh6 ♖xh6 18 ♖c7+! ♖xc7 19 ♙b5+ 1-0

What can we say here? There was no profound objection to 8...e5?!; it simply didn't work because White's attack was too strong. Naturally, such a central counter-thrust would be even less effective had White already played 0-0-0, so one can tentatively conclude that the *classical* objection to 7 g4 is not operative here. Of course, Black may discover other methods which render 7 g4 harmless or even unsatisfactory, but that's another issue.

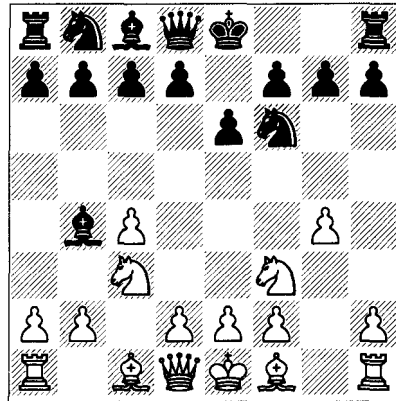
Sticking with g4 for a moment, here's an even stranger version of the same idea:

Krasenkow – Gild. Garcia
FIDE KO Wch, Groningen 1997

1 ♖f3 ♖f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♖c3 ♙b4 4 g4!? (D)

As Krasenkow says: "A novelty on move 4 in a thoroughly developed opening? Unbelievable!" 4 g4 was apparently discovered independently by Zviagintsev and Krasenkow. Once

B



again, 4...♖xg4 5 ♖g1 with ♖xg7 to follow is highly undesirable for Black, so he turns to...

4...d5?!

Krasenkow's annotation. If he is right, we have another case where the direct counterattack in the centre is **not** the correct counter to a wild early flank thrust. Instead, Pelletier-Huss, Cannes 1998 saw 4...h6 (as above) 5 ♖g1 (Zviagintsev suggested 5 h3) 5...b6 6 d3 ♙b7 7 e4 d5 8 e5 ♖fd7 with an obscure position.

5 g5 ♖e4 6 ♖a4+! ♖c6 7 ♖xe4 dxe4 8 ♖e5 e3!

The only chance – to counterattack before he is totally tied down.

9 fxe3 ♖xg5 10 ♖f3 ♖e7?

Krasenkow prefers 10...♖h6 or 10...♖f6, but White would retain the advantage.

11 a3 ♙d6 12 d4 ♙d7 13 ♖c2 ♖f6 14 b4 e5? 15 d5 ♙f5 16 ♖a4 ♙e4 17 dxc6 b5 18 cxb5 ♙xf3 19 exf3 e4 20 ♖a2 exf3 21 ♖f2

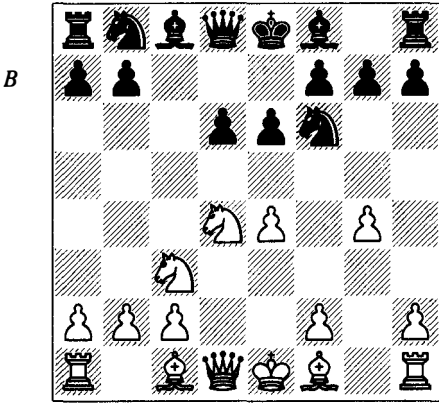
In spite of his opponent's tricks, White has emerged with a winning position.

The story of g4 in the Sicilian is a remarkable one. Every year, it seems that White finds a new (and earlier!) context in which to play this move; and it would be fair to say that the revival of White's chances versus the Sicilian Defence on the top levels can be largely attributed to various innovations involving g4. In fact, one could write an entertaining book entitled "g4 in 1990s Sicilian Defences" and be swamped by the choice of material.

With respect to theories of central and flank play, the interesting thing to note is that in many cases White makes this move well before one would consider his development complete or the central situation stable.

To begin with the most obvious and early example, consider the Keres Attack:

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 e6 6 g4 (D)

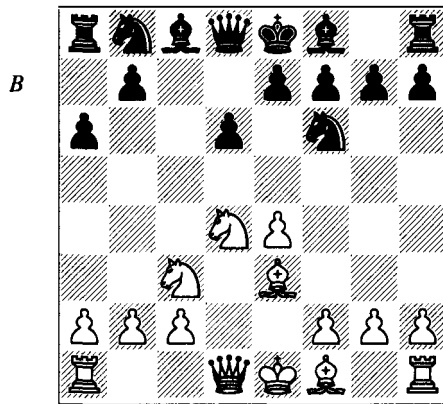


This is now such an established weapon that we forget how strange it seemed when Keres and others first employed it. White has only two pieces out, but prefers to forego further development until he can drive the enemy knight away by g4. Failing that (in the case of 6...h6), he has gained space, discouraged ...0-0, and may even use the g4 move to play ♖g2. Needless to say, in view of the standard dogma about such flank pawn moves, many early games featured the central counterattack 6...d5?!, which, however, led to a clear advantage for White after 7 exd5 ♘xd5 8 ♖b5+ ♗d7 9 ♘xd5 exd5 10 ♗e2+ ♖e7 (10...♗e7 11 ♖e3 g6 12 ♖xd7+ ♘xd7 13 ♘b5 ♗e5 14 0-0-0 was practically winning in Fischer-Reshevsky, US Ch 1966/7) 11 ♘f5, and Black is forced into the miserable 11...♗f8 12 ♖xd7 ♘xd7 13 ♖f4, when he is clearly worse. There is no guarantee that a move such as 6...d5 won't work in such situations; in fact it might have been the best reply had White played another order, say, 6 ♖e2 (instead of 6 g4) 6...♘c6 7 g4 d5. The point is that these are analysable problems, and White shouldn't limit his weaponry based upon abstract principles.

In the Keres Attack, ultimately, Black settled upon 6...h6 and 6...♘c6 as favourite replies, with 6...a6 a slightly riskier alternative. But in general, strong players are irritated enough by 6 g4 that they increasingly avoid it altogether by means of other move-orders (for example,

5...a6 followed by ...e6 or ...e5, as used by Kasparov).

In the Najdorf, 1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 (a flank move, by the way, hardly justified by Black's one-piece development!), White's g4 ideas have become almost routine. For example, after the popular move 6 ♖e3 (D), we have:



a) 6...e6 7 g4!?, and now, for example, 7...h6 8 f4 b5 9 ♖g2 ♖b7 10 g5 hxg5 11 fxg5 ♘h5 12 g6, as in several games, the rapidplay game Shirov-Van Wely, Monaco 1997 continuing 12...♘f6 13 gxf7+ ♗xf7 14 0-0 ♘d7 15 ♘xe6! ♗xe6 16 e5 ♖xg2 17 exf6 ♘xf6 18 ♗xg2 with a powerful ongoing attack. No positional subtleties in that one!

b) The reply 6...e5 will not discourage someone beset with g4 fever, e.g., Shirov-Kasparov, Tilburg 1997 continued 7 ♘b3 ♖e6 8 f3 ♖e7 9 ♗d2 ♘bd7 (9...h5!? – a prophylactic flank move to prevent g4! – has been played with some success) 10 g4 h6 11 0-0-0 b5 (more flank-versus-flank action!) 12 h4 ♘b6 13 ♗b1 b4 14 ♖xb6 ♗xb6 15 ♘d5 ♖xd5 16 exd5 with a big mess.

c) In view of the above, Black often goes to flank play himself by 6...♘g4 7 ♖g5 h6 8 ♖h4 g5 9 ♖g3 ♖g7 10 ♖e2 h5!? (10...♘c6 is more common). Then 11 h4 gxh4 12 ♗xh4 ♘c6 leaves Black with a weak h-pawn, but resolves the central situation with gain of time: 13 ♘b3 ♖e6 14 ♗d2 ♗b6 15 ♘d5 ♖xd5 16 exd5 ♘ce5 17 0-0-0 ♘g6! 18 ♗h3 ♖h6 19 f4 ♗e3 and Black had full equality in two recent games. Notice the pragmatic way in which Black employs apparently weakening kingside moves in

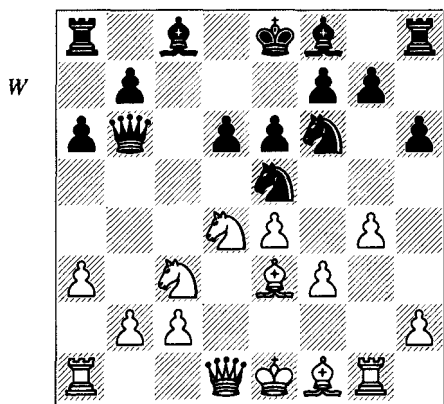
order to achieve effective development, even in an opening so notoriously tactical as the Sicilian.

There's almost a 'pawns-before-pieces' attitude in the following game, an example of the 'English Attack' f3/g4 structure which top players (such as Short and Anand) have used to inflict damage on the Sicilian:

Kasparov – Kamsky

Linares 1993

1 e4 c5 2 ♟f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♟xd4 ♟f6 5 ♟c3 d6 6 ♟e3 a6 7 f3 ♟bd7 8 g4 h6 9 ♟g1 ♟b6 10 a3! ♟e5 (D)



11 ♟f2!

Moving this piece twice achieves the goal of driving away Black's queen; this takes priority over development.

11... ♟c7 12 f4 ♟c4?! 13 ♟xc4 ♟xc4 14 ♟f3 e5? 15 ♟f5 ♟xf5 16 gxf5 d5 17 fxe5 ♟xe4 18 ♟g4!

With a clear advantage for White. In this example, it almost seemed as though White forgot that he was supposed to get his pieces out; and yet in the end, his development was superior.

Finally, White can embark on a g4 adventure even when there's no target on f6, e.g., 1 e4 c5 2 ♟f3 ♟c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♟xd4 e6 5 ♟c3 d6 6 g4!?, as played by Karpov in 1985 and more recently, by Shirov. One might consider this a prophylactic move, discouraging ...♟f6, but it's interesting that even 6...♟ge7 can be answered by more pawn moves: 7 ♟e3 a6 8 g5 b5 9 f4 ♟b7 10 ♟g2 with an unclear position, as in Shabalov-Smirin, Los Angeles 1997.

An interesting point about precisely these (but not all) Sicilian examples is that according to current theory, the response ...d5 to g4 would have been inferior. How far we have come from classical days, in which that would be considered the automatic punishment for such bravado!

To complete this section, let me just refer the reader to some other early flank thrusts in the openings. There are some obvious examples we don't think about, but, for example, how perfectly normal the move 6 h4 in the Caro-Kann after 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♟c3 dxe4 4 ♟xe4 ♟f5 5 ♟g3 ♟g6 seems to us. And yet Alekhine, commenting upon 6 ♟f3, remarks "The formerly so popular 'attacking' move, 6 h4, which is suitable only for a knight attack [presumably he means that after ...h6, ♟e5 will come with tempo – JW] and weakens the king's position without compensation, has been discarded little by little and rightly so." Of course today, by pure dint of practice, we know that the space gained on White's kingside by 6 h4 h6 7 ♟f3 ♟d7 8 h5 can be very useful indeed. As for the king, it should go queenside anyway, so that White can quickly claim the central files. Of course, hindsight is 20-20, but this idea of 'weakening flank moves' has been a powerful deterrent to some good ideas.

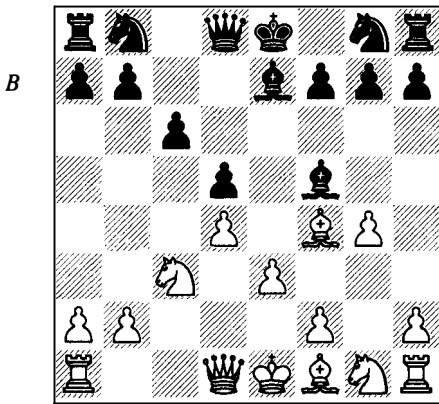
Another Caro-Kann example occurs in the Advance Variation after 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5, a move which, by the way, Reuben Fine says is 'absolutely useless', since Black can play ...♟f5, ...e6, and ...c5, with a superior version of the French Defence. If only the world's top players over the last 15 years had it so easy! Again, the pragmatic reality of concrete variations belies such superficial judgements. Anyway, back to 3 e5 ♟f5, White has created a certain amount of havoc (and theory is still unsettled) in the line 4 ♟c3 e6 5 g4!? ♟g6 6 ♟ge2, intending 6...c5 7 h4. Maybe, White reasons, I can make the bishop wish it were back behind the pawn-chain!

In numerous lines of the Alekhine with 1 e4 ♟f6 2 e5 ♟d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♟f3, White will find the move a4 useful, to gain space and drive a black knight from b6. One such line is 4...g6 5 ♟c4 ♟b6 6 ♟b3 ♟g7 7 a4!?

Against certain fianchetto systems, h4-h5 is of course possible long before one's development

is completed. The Dutch Defence with 1 d4 f5 2 ♘c3 d5 (2...g6?! 3 h4 ♘f6 4 h5! is worse after 4...♘h5 5 ♚xh5! gxh5 6 e4 with attack, or 4...♙g7 5 h6 ♙f8 6 ♙g5 d5 7 ♚d2 e6 8 0-0-0 ♙b4 9 f3, as given in *ECO*) 3 ♙g5 g6 4 h4!? ♙g7 5 e3 is one example.

Botvinnik awakened Queen's Gambit Declined theory after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♙e7 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♙f4 c6 6 e3 ♙f5 7 g4!? (*D*), again forcing the bishop to commit.



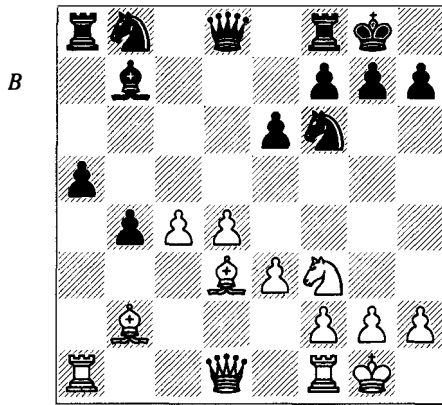
After 7...♙g6 8 h4! or 7...♙e6 8 h3, it turns out that White's space advantage can be very useful, as Botvinnik showed against Petrosian. Decades later, both Korchnoi and Kasparov achieved advantages versus Karpov in World Championship play with this same line, a good indication that 7 g4 has more than mere surprise value to it.

There are plenty of black examples as well. In the 1 e4 c5 2 c3 Sicilian, one of the currently popular lines goes 1 e4 c5 2 c3 ♘f6 3 e5 ♘d5 4 ♘f3 ♘c6 5 ♙c4 ♘b6 6 ♙b3 c4 7 ♙c2 ♚c7 8 ♚e2 g5!?, a purely practical device for undermining the white e-pawn. Even after 9 e6 dxe6 10 ♘xg5 ♚e5, Black's apparently weakened pawns are compensated by his strong centre and active pieces.

In the French Defence, the move ...g5 appears early on in several variations. One of the best-known of these goes 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘d2 ♘f6 4 e5 ♘fd7 5 f4 c5 6 c3 ♘c6 7 ♘df3 ♚b6 8 g3 cxd4 9 cxd4 ♙b4+ 10 ♙f2 g5!?. This appears to be positional suicide on the kingside, but the idea is to compromise White's structure before he completes his development and is able to secure his space advantage. After 11

fxg5 ♘dxe5, Black eliminates the crucial e-pawn; otherwise, he can either open the g-file by ...gxf4 or drive back White's only developed piece by ...g4.

We could fill a chapter with examples of ...b5. A recently popular variation is the Notebook/Abrahams line of the Queen's Gambit: 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 c6 4 ♘f3 dxc4 5 a4 ♙b4 6 e3 b5 7 ♙d2 a5 8 axb5 ♙xc3 9 ♙xc3 cxb5 10 b3 ♙b7 11 bxc4 b4 12 ♙b2 ♘f6 13 ♙d3 0-0 14 0-0 (*D*).



White is clearly on top in the centre, but Black counts on his advanced queenside passed pawns to compensate him. The status of this line is as yet unresolved.

There are many such examples, some so accepted that we aren't quite aware how strange they might have looked just a half century ago. For example, the Grünfeld with 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 ♘f3 ♙g7 5 ♚b3 dxc4 6 ♚xc4 0-0 7 e4, and now, instead of developing those queenside pieces, 7...a6. In fact, Black wants to move a few other pawns, too, before he deigns to bring his pieces out, e.g., 8 ♙e2 b5 9 ♚b3 c5! 10 dxc5 ♙b7, a line which has served Black well.

In conclusion, suffice it to say that strictures against flank advances in undeveloped positions are quite as limiting of the chess imagination as the other rules we have been discussing.

Other Pawn Issues

Unfortunately, there are too many new pawn structures and ideas about pawn play to do them all justice in this book. To some extent, pawn

play is inextricable from other issues, as our discussions of prophylaxis and dynamism will make clear. Nor are the differences in modern pawn play always easy to define, even when they obviously exist. The treatment of doubled pawns, for example, has probably not undergone quite the radical change we have seen in the case of pawn-chains or backward pawns. For that reason, I combined both the classical approach to doubled pawns and some new ideas about them in Part 1, Chapter 4. There we saw that players are both creating and allowing doubled pawns in a variety of situations which would have previously been thought too risky or time-consuming. For an amazing example of ultra-modern rejection of principle, I recommend going back and re-examining the Ivanchuk-Anand game at the end of that section. It would naturally be possible to expand upon those ideas here. In some lines of modern opening theory, for example, the acceptance of doubled pawns has become routine, e.g., Black meets ♟xf6 by ...gxf6 in a number of lines of the Open Sicilian (most notably the Richter-Rauzer). Also, pawn captures away from the centre which create doubled pawns are probably more acceptable than in previous times (see, for example, the fxc3 captures after ...dxc3 in the hybrid Nimzo/Queen's Indian line 1 d4 ♟f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♟f3 b6 4 ♟c3 ♟b4 5 ♟g5 h6 6 ♟h4 ♟b7 7 e3 g5 8 ♟g3 ♟e4). But to some extent, these situations tend to be pragmatic ones, not reflecting any new consciousness.

Probably the most thematically consistent recent development with respect to doubled pawns has been their creation at the cost of the bishop-pair and considerable loss of time. Such a previously unheard-of combination of concessions is demonstrated in such lines as:

a) 1 d4 g6 2 c4 ♟g7 3 ♟c3 c5 4 d5 ♟xc3+ 5 bxc3 f5!;

b) 1 c4 b6 2 ♟f3 ♟b7 3 g3 ♟xf3!? 4 exf3 c5; and

c) 1 c4 c5 2 ♟c3 ♟c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♟g2 ♟g7 5 b3 e6 6 ♟xc6!?

Consider that the Hübner Variation of the Nimzo-Indian (1 d4 ♟f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♟c3 ♟b4 4 e3 c5 5 ♟f3 ♟c6 6 ♟d3 ♟xc3+ 7 bxc3 d6) was considered rather bold and modern just a few years ago, due to the voluntary surrender of the b4-bishop (with no loss of tempo, namely a3,

on White's part). But the above efforts are more radical still; in all three cases, it takes *three* moves to develop and exchange the bishop (...g6 is not a useful move such as ...e6 was in the Nimzo-Indian, for example); and the holes left by the movement of the knight's pawn present an extra challenge for the exchanger. In view of the extremely sceptical attitude towards the fianchetto expressed by Alekhine and others of his time, can we imagine his reaction to such play, or worse, that of greats such as Lasker and Capablanca? Only Nimzowitsch might have an instinctive sympathy with the above examples, and it has taken chess almost 50 years to vindicate his eccentricity on such matters. I encourage the reader to keep an eye out for surprising uses of doubled pawns. I think he will discover that modern players are much less dogmatic than their predecessors about taking them on.

I have continually emphasized that modern pawn play is pragmatic and rule-independent. But to close this chapter, let me point to an insight that might serve as a useful modern generality. In discussing rules which apply to the middlegame but not endgame, Suba states: "The outside passed pawn is more of a weakness in the middlegame, when the fight is concentrated on the centre and kingside." This is a bit shocking; we are so used to outside passed pawns as assets in the endgame that it doesn't occur to us that they might be weak otherwise. The only way to test such a hypothesis is to find supporting examples and counter-examples. I find Suba's comment intriguing, because I can think of several cases in which it is true, and none in which it is clearly contradicted. I mentioned one such supporting case earlier in this chapter: the white a2-pawn in the Benko Gambit after 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 ♟xa6. That pawn is notoriously weak and often falls; it certainly has few serious prospects of advancing in the middlegame, although of course it might prove decisive in an ending. Then there's the white h-pawn in the ♟g4 French Poisoned-Pawn Winawer (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♟c3 ♟b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♟xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♟e7 7 ♟g4 ♟c7 8 ♟xg7 ♟g8 9 ♟xh7 cxd4, etc.). Anyone familiar with these lines knows how often this pawn is surrounded and captured, and in any case, it is usually a target of attack by Black in the middlegame.

Needless to say, in conjunction with the advance of the g-pawn, it can also prove to be a winning advantage in an ending. A third example would be Black's a-pawn in the gambit line of the 8 ♖b1 Grünfeld Exchange Variation (1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 cxd5 ♘xd5 5 e4 ♘xc3 6 bxc3 ♙g7 7 ♘f3 c5 8 ♖b1 0-0 9 ♙e2 cxd4 10 cxd4 ♗a5+ 11 ♙d2 ♗xa2). There are indeed circumstances in which it is useful to advance that pawn to a5 or a4; but in the majority of cases, White's pressure on the queen-side files (as in the Benko) and the superior development allowed by his central pawn-mass neutralize the passed a- and b-pawns in the middlegame. In fact, it is very common for both of these pawns to be captured in return for one of White's central pawns. Finally, we have already noted elsewhere in this book that in the Noteboom/Abrahams Variation of the Queen's

Gambit (1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 e6 4 ♘c3 dxc4 5 a4 ♙b4 6 e3 b5 7 ♙d2 a5 8 axb5 ♙xc3 9 ♙xc3 cxb5 10 b3 ♙b7 and then 11 bxc4 b4 12 ♙b2 or 11 d5!? ♘f6 12 bxc4 b4 13 ♙xf6), White's centre does rather well against *two* outside connected passed pawns which are already fairly advanced!

So Suba's hypothesis makes a certain amount of sense to me. It would be interesting to pore over modern practice and try to come up with other such neo-principles. My guess is that most of them would prove to be highly qualified by conditions, and much more difficult to state. One thing seems clear, however: modern pawn play has come a long way since the time of Nimzowitsch! The alert reader will find many further examples of novel pawn treatments in the rest of Part 2, even in sections nominally devoted to other subjects.

4 The Modern Bishop

It is time to reopen the subject of minor-piece play. In Part 1 (Chapter 6), we looked at conventional ideas about minor pieces, following the traditional presentation of middlegame books. In the next few chapters, I want to look at the advances which have altered that conventional view. First, I will examine each piece in isolation, exploring issues which can reasonably be treated in that fashion. A chapter will then follow on the interaction between, and comparative values of, bishops and knights. Finally, the subject of the exchange sacrifice (rook for bishop or rook for knight) is given its own chapter.

As this breadth of material shows, I feel that the treatment of minor pieces constitutes an important part of what has changed since the advent of modern chess. Although one could write volumes about rooks and their qualities, one would be hard-pressed to make a case for numerous *advances* that we have experienced in rook play. (I have attempted to address this subject in Part 1, but without any pretence that it is an extensive one.) Minor-piece play is another matter; for one thing, the issues involved are far more complex. I believe that if you asked chess teachers to name the most difficult positional problems players face, most of them would put the proper handling and assessment of minor pieces high on their list. Moreover, countless positions in practical chess depend upon who has the better minor pieces. As Steve Mayer says in the Preface to his book *Bishop versus Knight: The Verdict*: “The most common material imbalance in chess is that of bishop versus knight.” By which he means, of course, that in any given situation one minor piece is usually more valuable than the other. That difference in value is of the utmost importance for understanding the new ideas in modern chess.

All That Fianchettoing

In an article written in 1928 (quoted by Keene in *ECOT*), Spielmann talks about openings in

his time. After reviewing a number of these, he mentions Nimzowitsch’s idea of 1 ♔f3 followed by b3 and ♙b2; against this, he says, a good defence is the counter-fianchetto by ...g6 and ...♙g7. Then he bursts out: “This constant fianchettoing! In the hands of the defender, whose task is to equalize the game, it constitutes a good weapon, but for the attacker it is of small value as a method of development.”

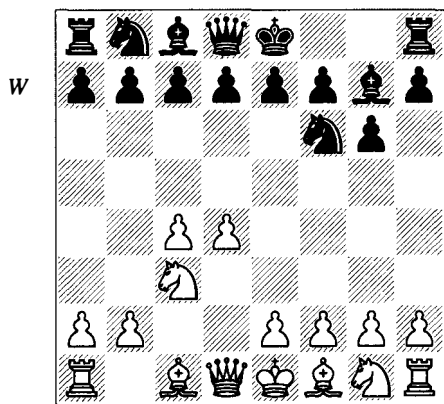
When I searched databases of Spielmann’s games, I found that, true to his word, he only resorted to a fianchetto as White in 2% of his games, whereas he played either ...b6 and ...♙b7 or ...g6 and ...♙g7 in almost 9% of them. I think that his irritated cry (“This constant fianchettoing!”) reflects a typical attitude of the time: that the fianchetto was an increasingly bothersome annoyance to the practitioners of true chess, i.e., those who occupied the centre properly, developed pieces in one move, and in general adhered to the gentleman’s rules for a real chess contest.

Little did he know how the use of the fianchetto would expand. Kingside fianchettoing for White (by g3) was a rare bird in Spielmann’s day. But Botvinnik used the g3 fianchetto in 9% of all his games, and in our time, Karpov has used it in 13% of his games. As for fianchettoes of all types with Black, Lasker did so in only about 5% of his total games (and often outside of normal development, after move 10), whereas Alekhine did so in about 8.5% of his. But Nimzowitsch used fianchettoes on the black side with gusto – 18% of his games – and Kasparov has established an amazing 28% mark! (All these figures refer to the percentage of total games played with both colours; hence, Kasparov fianchettoes in over half of his games as Black!). The reality is still more extreme, as the above figures don’t include fianchettoes by ...b5 and ...♙b7, which have become more common in modern chess (Kasparov’s fianchetto percentage on the black side, for example, rises to 31% of all his games if these are taken into account).

The double fianchetto, an accepted part of today's play, was held in particular scorn by some of the old school. About the moves 1 Qf3 Qf6 2 b3 d6 3 g3 , which Nimzowitsch (White) played against him in New York 1927, Alekhine comments: "So, the purest *hypermodernerei*. In this game it would certainly have brought White no laurels if his opponent had not overestimated his position and imagined that such a set-up could be refuted by any means." What do we read in this miffed tone? Alekhine was a bit too smart to truly believe that b3 and g3 was refutable; he was simply irritated that anyone could actually play this way and beat him! On move six, suggesting an improvement for Black (which is accompanied by some poor analysis), he goes on say: "In that case [after his suggested move – JW] ... the 'double-hole' opening would once again have been reduced *ad absurdum*." This was a reference to Teichmann, who had described Réti's (double-fianchetto) opening as 'the stupid double-hole variation', reflecting the feelings of many traditionalists.

What happened? Essentially, the hyper-moderns were right about the fianchetto, which allowed a player to exert influence on the centre without being subjected to harassment by pieces and pawns. In addition, the defensive functions of a fianchettoed bishop had been underestimated, in particular its role in defending the king.

One way to think about the fianchetto and how it affects one's own bishop is to take into account the *opponent's* bishops. Consider the King's Indian Defence for a moment, after 1 d4 Qf6 2 c4 g6 3 Qc3 Qg7 (D).



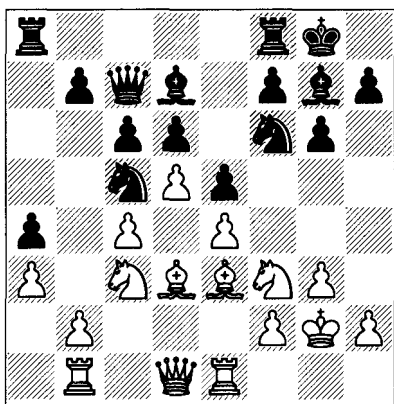
Let's talk about White's queen's bishop. In some, less popular, lines, White tries to bring it out to f4 or g5 and then play e3 , so that both of his bishops will be 'good' (unobstructed by the centre pawns). But if the bishop goes to g5 , it can be attacked by ...h6 , and after Qh4 , the idea ...g5 , and after Qg3 gaining the bishop-pair by ...Qh5 , which has been shown to compensate for his weakened kingside (this is also true in the Benoni Defence). Or, if the bishop goes to f4 , it will often lose a tempo to ...d6 and ...e5 (or in some cases ...Qh5). So Black's structure plays a role in limiting the possibilities of White's dark-squared bishop. On the other hand, when White plays conventionally by 4 e4 d6 5 Qf3 0-0 6 Qe2 , keeping that bishop's diagonal from c1 to h6 free, the typical insertion of ...e5 for Black and d5 for White has an interesting effect. Now Black's g7 -bishop is 'bad', but suddenly, White's light-squared bishop is equally bad, hemmed in by the c4-d5-e4 structure. Also, the optical assessment of a fianchettoed bishop as 'good' or 'bad' is often deceptive, as we shall see in the next section. The point is that simply focusing on the fate of the g7 -bishop (which is hemmed in after ...e5) ignores the accompanying effect on the opponent's pieces.

It should hardly be necessary to list the multitudinous examples of the fianchetto in today's openings. This is one of the clearest and most obvious examples of a radical change in today's chess. Now we have entire opening complexes such as the English Opening dominated by fianchettoes by both sides, and the various Indian openings have such latent dynamism as to refute completely Spielmann's notion that the fianchetto was of no use to the attacker. Most Sicilian Defences depend upon the efficacy of a fianchettoed bishop, whether on g7 or b7 . White uses g3 to counter virtually every Indian Defence, and even fianchettoes in the Queen's Gambit (Catalan). And so forth.

Both conceptually and in practice, the fianchettoed bishop has changed the nature of modern chess. As for the idea that the fianchetto is somehow less 'dynamic', one need only note that bishops developed in classical fashion are far more subject to exchange, with consequent simplification, than are their fianchettoed partners. The implications for a real fight with maximal complications should be obvious.

The New Morality of Bad Bishops

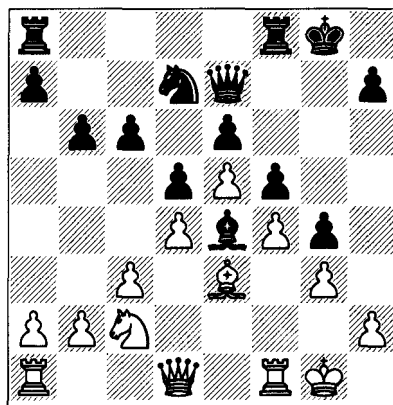
The traditional view has it that a bishop which is of the same colour as one's pawns is a 'bad' bishop, in that the mobility of the bishop is restricted by its own pawns, and the squares in front of those pawns are unprotected by the bishop. To begin with, we should make some qualifications. The first is that it is the centre pawns which for the most part determine whether a bishop is 'bad' or not. The d- and e-pawns are of the most importance, followed by the c- and f-pawns, whereas the other pawns are largely irrelevant (until the endgame, when they can once again determine how bad a bishop is). Let me illustrate this with a simple example:



This is from a King's Indian Defence. Black has six pawns on light squares and only two pawns on dark squares, and yet his light-squared bishop on d7 is 'good' whereas his dark-squared bishop on g7 is 'bad'. Similarly, White has a 'bad' light-squared bishop, although only three of his eight pawns are on light squares.

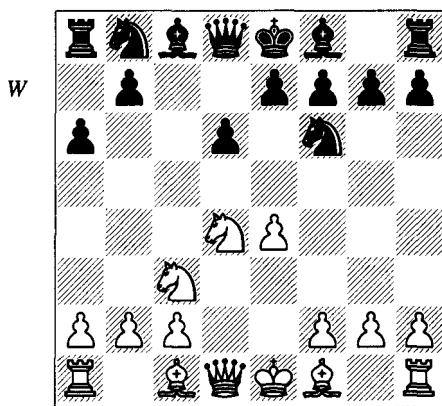
Another fairly obvious qualification is that if the bishop is 'outside' its same-colour pawns (which is to say, it is not trapped behind them); then that bishop is still 'bad', technically speaking, but may be perfectly effective, especially in the middlegame. Here is a stark example of bad bishops of contrasting strengths (D):

In the endgame, there are few situations in which a bad bishop is better than a good one. The exceptions tend to be cases in which the



bishop, by defending its own pawns, is able to prevent progress by the opponent and thus achieve a draw. I will assume that the reader is familiar with the typical endgame examples of a good bishop defeating a bad bishop, or a knight doing the same thing, and will not pursue this topic.

Even one centre pawn on the wrong colour can make a bishop bad, or at least a problem piece. The Sicilian Defence gives us a well-known example. Larsen's tongue-in-cheek suggestion that White is positionally lost after 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 d6 (or alternatively, 2...♗c6 or 2...e6) 3 d4 cxd4 has as its basis the fact that Black has an extra centre pawn. White has another problem, however: his king's bishop. Consider the Najdorf Variation after 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♗f6 5 ♗c3 a6 (D).



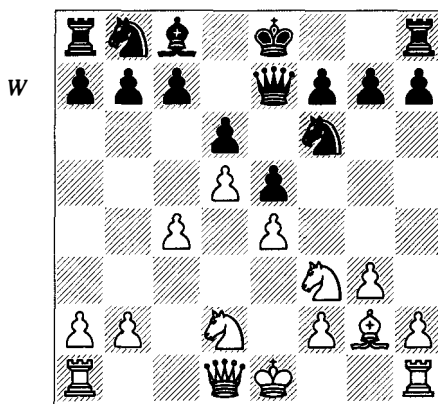
Where does the f1-bishop go? On g2 or d3, it is blocked by the e-pawn and lacks scope. On e2, it is passively placed, and if it travels further to f3 (with or without the move f4), Black can

either directly or indirectly stop White's e5, rendering the bishop 'bad'. All this might suggest ♖c4; but there, the bishop is subject to loss of tempi by ...b5 or ...d5, with ...♘bd7-c5 another consideration, when the e-pawn requires further protection.

So far, so obvious. But I give this example to point out a third qualification which I believe has been neglected in the literature: a bad bishop is a particular liability for the player *committed to attack*. One could say that in our Najdorf example, when Black plays ...e5 or ...e6 and puts his bishop on e7, that it is every bit as bad as White's bishop on g2 or d3. This is true, but in the Sicilian (as in many modern defences), Black holds some long-term positional trumps: the aforementioned extra centre pawn and a ready-made minority attack aided by his open c-file. White cannot therefore sit still; it is incumbent upon him either to disturb the pawn structure or to embark upon direct attack, or both. This requires maximal activity for his pieces, in order to create threats. It would be nice if his bishop were not hemmed in for such an effort. Black, on the other hand, is well-off maintaining the structural status quo, including his bad bishop, until some point in the middle-game or endgame when he can make an advantageous break in the centre or advance on the queenside. Anyone trying to devise schemes for the white side of the Open Sicilian will understand what I'm talking about and recognize the negative role White's bad light-squared bishop often plays.

We might, then, posit a provisional modern 'principle', then, that a bad bishop is not so bad if one holds structural advantages in a stable position. Naturally, White would not play the Open Sicilian if he didn't have a reasonable chance of attacking and of favourably transforming the pawn structure. But as a rule(?), the attacker's bad bishop tends to be the more permanent problem. Similar examples abound in modern chess, for example, in the case of Black's hedgehog formations versus a bishop on g2, or in the Bogo-Indian line 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 ♖b4+ 4 ♙d2 ♗e7 5 g3 ♘c6 6 ♙g2 ♙xd2+ 7 ♘bx d2 d6 8 e4 e5 9 d5 ♘b8 (D).

In this line, White's bishop is bad and Black's good, of course; but if White can make effective breaks by c5 and/or f4, his attack will



break down Black's structure and free his own bishop. The longer Black can prevent such breaks and stabilize the situation, the more of a problem the g2-bishop becomes.

The idea of the extra centre pawn is quite relevant here. When Suba speaks of 'bad bishops protecting good pawns', he may have in mind the dynamic potential of such pawns. Three examples we have already mentioned with regard to backward pawns are the Open Sicilian structures with ...e6 & ...d6 versus e4, and ...e5 & ...d6 versus e4, as well as the French Defence structure with ...e6 & ...d5 versus d4 (see Chapter 3). In each case, White has an open file against a backward pawn, but the weak pawn is an extra centre pawn, and the bad bishop protecting it prevents the first player from having anything but an optical advantage. In the meantime, the constant threat of ...d5 (in the Sicilian) or ...e5 (in the French), along with the play against the opposing white e- or d-pawn (which, as a lone centre pawn, can be awkward to defend), greatly ameliorates the 'badness' of Black's bishop in these cases.

The King's Indian Defence is a fruitful source for instructive positional exemplars, and it is all the more so for the subject of the bad bishop. Modern chess is rife with paradox, and one of these is the idea of intentionally creating a bad bishop at the outset of the game, only then to spend the rest of the game trying to free it! In the KID, this happens at an early stage, the minute Black plays ...e5, e.g., after 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♙g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♘f3 0-0 6 ♙e2 e5, or any other line in which ...e5 is played early on. We have already discussed how Black's bad bishop tends to be counterbalanced by White's

own light-squared one, after d5 is played (and is difficult to avoid this indefinitely; for at some point, Black's ...exd4 can open up lines for both the bishop on g7 and a rook on e8, whereas White's light-squared bishop remains passive. This is, of course, a classic trade-off of space for activity; but in most KID lines, d5 is the best move at some point).

A very interesting situation arises after Black plays ...e5, White plays d5, and Black tries to exchange his dark-squared bishop (often, by ...♗h6); this arises in the Czech Benoni and Modern Defence as well. Although it is unwise to generalize about so dynamic an opening, it is remarkable how often trading the wonderful c1-bishop for the awful g7-bishop favours White! Let's look at a few examples:

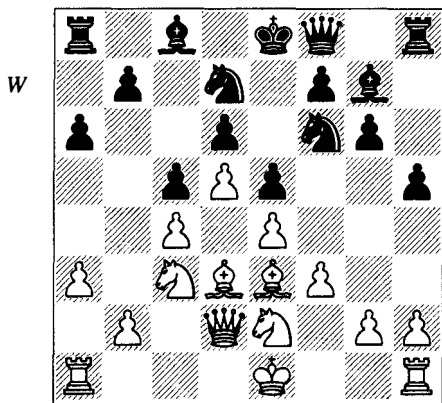
Zsu. Polgar – Gheorghiu

Baden-Baden 1985

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 d6 4 ♘c3 g6 5 e4 ♗g7 6 f3 e5 7 ♗g5 h6 8 ♖e3 h5

Already trying to exchange the 'bad' bishop; for the moment, White prevents this.

9 ♗d2 a6 10 ♖d3 ♗e7 11 ♘ge2 ♗bd7 12 a3 ♗f8?! (D)



Again intending ...♗h6; this time White side-steps.

13 ♗c2! ♗h6 14 ♖f2 ♗g5

A single-minded policy! Black wants to play ...♗h6 and ...♗e3. Of course, with White's advantage in space, other plans are hard to come by.

15 b4 b6 16 ♖b1! ♗h6? 17 h4! ♗e3 18 ♗xe3 ♗xe3 19 f4

Whoops! ♘d1 is threatened.

19...cxb4 20 axb4 b5 21 c5

Winning a piece, in view of ♘d1 again.

21...♘xc5 22 bxc5 ♘g4 23 ♘d1 ♗xc5 24 ♖c1 ♗xc2 25 ♖xc2

...and White went on to win.

Just a trick? Hardly, since without the ...♗e3 idea, Black would have had to wait passively for White's attack.

A recent game illustrates this:

Seirawan – Ivanchuk

FIDE KO World Ch, Groningen 1997

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♖d3 e5 6 d5 a5 7 ♘ge2 ♗a6 8 f3 ♘d7?!

This prepares Black's next.

9 ♗e3 ♗h6? 10 ♗d2

10 ♗xh6 cedes control of the dark squares unnecessarily after 10...♗h4+ and ...♗xh6.

10...♗xe3 11 ♗xe3 c6 12 ♗h6!

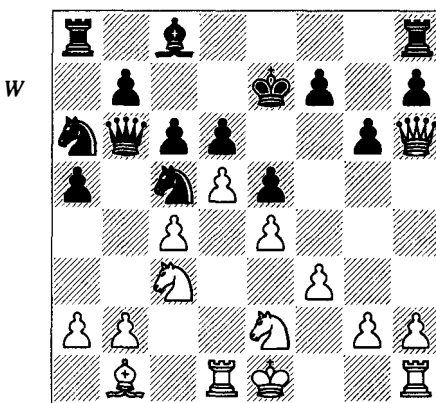
Gee, now that there's nothing covering all these kingside holes...

12...♘dc5 13 ♖d1 ♗b6 14 ♖b1!

Threatening dxc6, hitting d6. Note how bad this bishop is, as if White cares!

14...♗e7? (D)

But 14...♗xb2 15 dxc6 bxc6 16 ♗g7 ♖f8 17 ♖xd6 is pretty awful, and a queen retreat to c7 allows ♗g7 and ♗xh7, or just 0-0 followed by f4.



15 f4!

Now we see the folly of the ...♗h6 idea, even when played by one of the world's foremost grandmasters. White's attack is already overwhelming, especially on the dark squares.

15...exf4 16 ♖f1 ♜f8 17 ♜xf4 f6 18 dxc6 ♜xc6 19 ♘d4 ♜e8 20 ♘d5+ ♜d8 21 ♜xd6+ ♘d7 22 ♘b5 1-0

Equally unimpressive is the Modern Defence line with 1 e4 g6 2 d4 ♘g7 3 c4 d6 4 ♘c3 e5 5 d5 ♘h6?!, which generally favours White, who has space and easily-realized pawn-breaks. In the Old Indian, a relevant example goes 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 d6 3 ♘c3 e5 4 ♘f3 ♘bd7 5 e4 ♘e7 6 ♘e2 c6 7 0-0-0 ♘e3 a6 9 d5 c5 10 ♘d2 ♘e8 11 a3 ♘g5 12 ♘xg5 ♜xg5 13 b4 Robatsch-Vukić, Tuzla 1981; White is considered clearly better here.

There are plenty of examples in other openings. Here's one in the Nimzo-Indian:

Knaak – Pláchetka

Bratislava 1983

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♘b4 4 e3 b6 5 ♘e2 ♘a6

To digress a bit, another example of a dubious ...♘a6 arises in the French Winawer after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♘b4 4 e5 ♘e7 5 a3 ♘xc3+ 6 bxc3 b6 7 ♜g4 ♘g6 8 h4 h5 9 ♜f3 ♘a6 10 ♘xa6 ♘xa6 11 ♘g5, and as Unger points out, Black wishes that he had his bad bishop back again: 11...♜d7 12 a4 ♜c6 13 ♘e2 ♜c4 14 0-0 c5 15 ♜fd1 cxd4? (but Black is in terrible shape anyway) 16 cxd4 ♜xc2 17 ♜ac1 ♜e4 18 ♜a3 f6 19 f3 ♜xe2 20 ♜d2 1-0 Ivkov-R.Byrne, Havana 1966. The 'bad' bishop was rather effective here!

6 ♘g3 ♘xc3+ 7 bxc3 d5 8 ♜f3!?

This is probably not best, but it emphasizes the danger of the 'bad' bishop exchange. I think the main line with 8 ♘a3 ♘xc4 9 ♘xc4 dxc4 10 0-0 ♜d7 11 e4 also favours White, who tends to exploits Black's weak light squares, of course.

8...0-0 9 cxd5 exd5

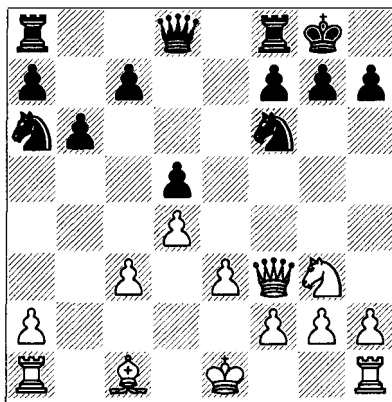
Not 9...♘xf1? 10 dxe6!; but probably best is 9...♜xd5, when 10 e4 ♜a5 11 ♘xa6 ♜xa6 12 ♘e2 ♘bd7 13 0-0 c5 14 ♘g3 favours White slightly, according to Pliester. Well, maybe or maybe not, but our game is instructive in any case.

10 ♘xa6 ♘xa6 (D)

11 ♜e2 ♘b8 12 0-0 c5 13 f3

Beginning a central pawn-roller, made possible by ...♘a6.

W



13...♘c6 14 ♘b2 ♜d7 15 e4! cxd4 16 cxd4 ♜e6

If 16...dxe4, 17 fxe4 intends 17...♘xd4 18 ♜f2!, for example, 18...♘e6 19 ♘xf6 gxf6 20 ♘f5 ♜h8 21 ♜b2, etc.

17 e5

White makes his bishop even 'worse', a quite irrelevant consideration.

17...♘d7 18 ♘h5 ♜fd8 19 ♜ad1 ♘f8 20 f4 f5 21 g4! ♘g6 22 gxf5 ♜xf5 23 ♘c1 ♜f8 24 ♘g3 ♜h3 25 f5 ♘h4 26 ♜d3

Now White's pawns are too strong, and the game finished quickly:

26...♜ae8 27 ♘b2 ♘b4 28 ♜b3 ♘xa2 29 ♜a3 ♜c8 30 ♜xa2 ♘xf5 31 ♜a3 ♘h4 32 ♘f5 1-0

What is happening here? For one thing, the absence of the fianchettoed bishop weakens the squares around the knight's pawn. But also (and this is particularly true of many King's Indian lines), White's resulting space advantage is if anything easier to exploit in the absence of the bad bishop, because his pawn-breaks can proceed without the danger that central pawn exchanges will free that piece! This may seem paradoxical, but is a good example of general prophylactic play, as discussed in Chapter 9.

In a sense, placing the fianchettoed bishop behind its own pawn-chain might be called a 'mysterious bishop move', analogous to Nimzowitsch's 'mysterious rook move'. For those unfamiliar with the latter, Nimzowitsch was wont to put a rook not on an open file, but on a closed one which would become open if his opponent played his most natural freeing or attacking pawn move. The rook might not seem to be doing anything, but it was discouraging

his opponent's main plan. Today, this is such a common technique that we hardly give it any thought. A bishop on g7 and a pawn on e5 for Black serve a similar purpose versus White's f4. Also, after a later ...f5, White has to take into account the power of the g7-bishop before he opts for exf5.

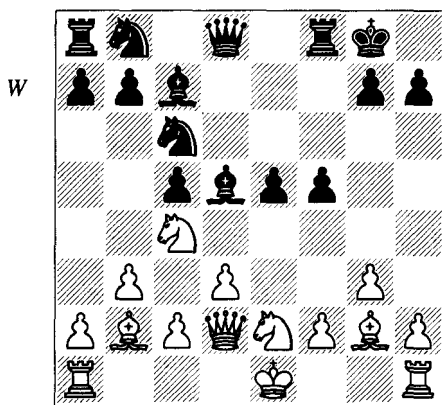
There has been a considerable change in the attitude towards bad bishops in modern chess. Certainly, a bad bishop is still to be avoided in most cases, particularly if simplification is possible and the endgame looms. But there is a wide variety of situations in which the intuitive desire to keep good bishops or exchange bad ones is misguided. One of Suba's games illustrates this.

Groszpeter – Suba
Kecskemet 1979

1 e4 ♘f6 2 ♖c3 d5 3 e5 ♗fd7 4 ♗xd5 ♗xe5 5 ♗e3 c5 6 b3 ♗ec6!

Moving a piece which has already moved three times; this reflects a modern attitude we have referred to before. Since ...e5 is desirable, the only question is how best to achieve it, not how many pieces we have out. It is revealing that no one had played this before.

7 ♗b2 e5 8 g3 ♗d6 9 ♗g2 0-0 10 ♗e2 f5 11 ♗c4 ♗c7 12 d3 ♗e6 13 ♗d2 ♗d5! (D)



Here Suba comments: "Eliminating the active white bishop allows Black virtually to 'play on his own'. A principle of dynamic strategy is thus illustrated – the most important strategic piece should be protected from exchange. Needless to say, classical strategy recommends

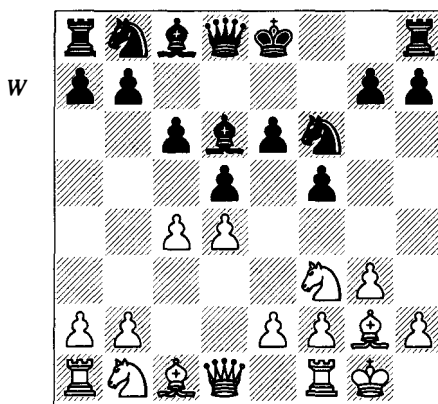
Black to avoid exchanges in such positions due to his space advantage, and especially to avoid exchanging his 'good bishop' as long as he still has his 'bad' one."

Well, it's not hard to see how irrelevant the morality of the bishops is here. The game continued...

14 ♗xd5+ ♗xd5 15 0-0-0 ♗d4 16 ♗e3 ♗d7 17 ♗c3 ♗bc6 18 ♗b1 b5

...and Black had a straightforward attack on the queenside as well as a grip on the centre. The bad c7-bishop went first to a5, and later to h4 via d8, finding plenty of useful work!

In Dvoretsky's book *Positional Play*, Vladimir Kramnik wrote an interesting essay about the modern Stonewall Variation of the Dutch Defence, which opens with 1 d4 f5 2 c4 ♗f6 3 ♗f3 e6 4 g3 d5 5 ♗g2 c6 6 0-0 ♗d6 (D).



Right away, Kramnik makes an interesting comment: "The main idea of Black's strategy is to limit the range of the g2-bishop. In my opinion, it is barely any stronger than the c8-bishop." What a remarkable statement! White's 'good' bishop (see the pawn on d4), he is saying, is only slightly better than the one on c8, which is considered one of the worst bishops in any opening!

Kramnik continues: "After castling, Black has a choice between two means of developing his queen's bishop. Sometimes it goes (via d7) to e8, freeing d7 for the queen's knight. Then it is possible to play ...♗h5 (with the option of exchanging it) or prepare ...c6-c5. Black more often plays ...b7-b6, ...♗c8-b7, and ...♗bd7, developing his queenside in similar fashion to the Queen's Indian or the Catalan."

I think the most interesting aspect of this voluntary acceptance of a bad bishop is that the earlier it occurs, the better. Chess is a very fluid game, and the side trying to get to a stable position versus the bad bishop will normally find it impossible to prevent all the possible liberating moves and changes of pawn structure, assuming that the bad bishop doesn't arise too late in the game. One example of this, in Kramnik's line:

Ki. Georgiev – Knaak

E.Germany-Bulgaria 1987

1 d4 f5 2 c4 ♟f6 3 ♟f3 e6 4 g3 d5 5 ♟g2 c6 6 0-0 ♟d6 7 b3 ♟e7 8 ♟b2 0-0 9 ♟e5 ♟d7

9...♟bd7 10 ♟d2 a5 is another plan.

10 ♟c1 ♟e8

This is the same route taken by another bad bishop in the French Defence, Tarrasch Variation, as discussed in a previous chapter. That bishop can also be exchanged from b5. Seldom is Black stuck with only one idea.

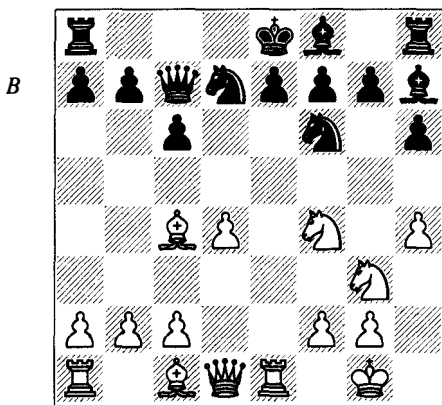
11 ♟a3 ♟bd7 12 ♟d3 ♟h5 13 ♟e1

13 ♟f4 ♟f7 14 ♟xd6 ♟xd6 15 ♟a3 ♟c7 with the idea ...dxc4 and ...e5 – Kramnik.

13...♟ae8 14 ♟xd6 ♟xd6 15 ♟a3 ♟c7 16 ♟d2 ♟e4 17 ♟f3 dxc4! 18 bxc4 c5

Black is fully equal.

Sometimes it's OK to make a bishop not just 'bad', but thoroughly stupid-looking, so long as one's goals are achieved. Here is an example of the lengths to which pragmatism pervades modern chess (pointed out by Mayer):



Porreca – Bronstein

Belgrade 1954

A more or less typical-looking Caro-Kann position. Black is leery of 11...e6 due to sacrifices on e6. Yet 11...0-0-0 loses the f-pawn. So:

11...♟g8!!

I've got to play ...e6 to get my pieces out, Black reasons, so ... I'll do anything to play it! The game continued...

12 ♟d3 e6 13 ♟f4 ♟d6 14 ♟xd6 ♟xd6 15 ♟f5 ♟f8 16 ♟f3 0-0-0 17 ♟g3 ♟h7!

...and White had no advantage whatsoever (in fact, Black's is probably the easier position to play). It's not exactly clear which rules Bronstein was flaunting, but many a classical player would recoil from a move like 11...♟g8.

That's enough for the moment on bad bishops. It's worth emphasizing, in conclusion, that having a bad bishop can and often will be reason enough to have a lost game. It is not that bad bishops are somehow ignored in modern chess, just that players are more aware of a considerable number of situations in which their morality is a secondary or irrelevant issue. In particular, the distinction between the owner of a bad bishop who has long-term positional trumps and the possessor of a bad bishop who is under the necessity of attacking should be borne in mind. Furthermore, the earlier in the opening that one commits to a bad bishop, the easier it is to exploit one's other advantages, favourably exchange that bishop, or transform the pawn structure so that the bishop is no longer bad. I hope the above discussion explains why we see so many top players taking on bad bishops in contemporary chess.

The Bishop-pair Reconsidered

Issues of two bishops will also arise in the chapters on bishops versus knights and the exchange sacrifice. Here I would like to have some fun by examining what some other middlegame authors have said about the bishop-pair, and then cite some statistics. For some reason, this subject seems to evoke strong emotions, particularly on the part of those who think that bishops are overrated. Flesch, in his *Planning in Chess*, begins his book with such a thesis, and he doesn't shy away from stating his case:

"Throughout human history false dogmas have arisen that greatly influence the politics, the social views and the arts of the particular

age. Thus also with chess in its international development.

“A typical mistake of chess theory and practice in the present age is to overestimate the bishop, and even more so the two bishops, when correspondingly valued against the knight and the two knights! Statistics ... have emphasized the superiority of the bishop-pair. But all this has come about from a mistaken approach to and a misunderstanding of the middle game. For there is no difference in the value of these pieces whatsoever.”

Right away, I (JW) have to interject that this last seems like more than a little bit of ‘dogma’ itself. It would be a pretty amazing coincidence if rules drawn up by a rather chaotic historical process resulted in literally no difference of value between two pieces which move in such completely different ways! The inventors of the game would have had to possess an insight into the game modern players, with the benefit of centuries of experience, don’t yet have.

But at any rate, what would be the reason that the side with the bishops is scoring better in international play (see also my research below)? Flesch continues:

“But, and this is the point, contemporary chess players use the bishop and especially the bishop-pair better and with more assurance than did their predecessors.

“Human beings – owing to their physical build – are less well shielded against attacks from the side than from the front. This disadvantage is more accentuated in our ‘forward-looking’ modern man as he spends a considerable amount of his time behind the wheel or in front of the file or television screen. Perhaps here can be found one of the reasons for overestimation of the bishop’s value ... the truth is that chess players of a previous age knew better how to use one or two knights.”

This sounds like something out of a nineteenth-century phrenology essay! Maybe a study of the games of chess-players who don’t drive and don’t watch TV would reveal some brilliant knight play! Of course, getting the grant money will be difficult.

In all seriousness, this unfortunate beginning to Flesch’s book belies its real worth as an excellent overview of modern positional concepts, with well-chosen examples. His overstatement

with regard to bishops and knights, however, draws on a tradition which goes back to Chigorin arguing against Lasker, as described in Romanovsky’s *Middlegame Planning* book. Chigorin’s point of view was that, Steinitz to the contrary notwithstanding, the two bishops did not constitute an advantage in and of themselves. Romanovsky devotes an entire chapter to this subject, agreeing vehemently with Chigorin. But the method he uses to demonstrate this is an odd one indeed: he gives three games in which the two bishops absolutely dominate the board, one at the cost of a pawn and another at the cost of the exchange! His point is that when the bishops dominate, they do so because of a ‘favourable combination of a number of positional factors’. In the first example, he makes a big point of the fact that, in the end, only *one* of Black’s two bishops really did the damage, so it really wasn’t ‘the two bishops’ that were successful. If that argument seems a little strained, consider his next example:

Kotov – Kashdan

USA-USSR radio match 1945

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 ♘f3 ♙g7 5 ♖b3 c6 6 ♙f4 0-0 7 e3 dxc4 8 ♙xc4 ♘bd7 9 0-0 ♘b6 10 ♙e2 ♙e6 11 ♖c2 ♘bd5 12 ♙e5 ♙f5 13 ♖b3 ♖b6 14 ♘d2 ♖xb3 15 ♘xb3 ♗ad8 16 ♘a5 ♙c8 17 ♙f3 h5 18 h3 ♘h7 19 ♙h2 ♘g5 20 ♙d1 c5 21 ♙b3 ♘xc3 22 bxc3 b6 23 ♘c6 ♗d7 24 f3 ♙a6

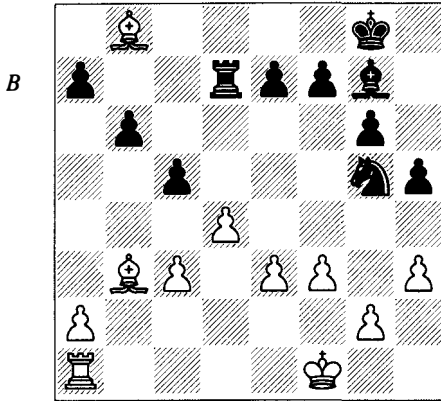
Romanovsky likes 24...♙b7 here, and “only after 25 ♘e5 ♙xe5 26 ♙xe5”, the move 26...♙a6. He then concedes that White would have an ‘unquestionable advantage’ following 27 ♗fc1, but only because he has a ‘superiority in the centre’ and a ‘compact pawn-chain’ (and Black’s isn’t compact?), but not because of the two bishops. OK...

25 ♘b8 ♗xb8 26 ♙xb8 ♙xf1 27 ♙xf1 (D)

The key position.

27...♘e6

Romanovsky gives this move a ‘?’ . After it, he likes White, but argues: “Is this a consequence of the ‘advantage of the two bishops’? No and once again no. Essentially the strength of the latter depends on the bad positions of the enemy pieces.” So where should those pieces be? Romanovsky suggests 27...e6, “intending



...♙f8, while he could have tried to introduce the knight into the game by ...♞h7-f6.”

Maybe it's just my modern prejudice (too much TV?), but I wouldn't like to be Black in this position at all! One feels that, as White, a Fischer, Karpov, or Kramnik, just to name a few players, would expect to win such a position against even the world's best. Of course, there is no way of definitively proving this, particularly as polling the top players would just verify their own prejudices (and/or driving habits).

28 ♖b1 cxd4 29 cxd4 ♖b7 30 ♙g3 b5 31 ♜c1 a5 32 ♜c8+ ♜h7 33 ♜e2 a4 34 ♙xe6 fxe6 35 ♖b8

“And so,” Romanovsky concludes triumphantly, “Black's defeat is provoked not by White's two bishops, which, incidentally, are already gone from the board, but the terrible position of his own bishop on g7.”

I need hardly point out an alternative explanation, known as trading one positional advantage for another, which is surely the case here. The game concluded quickly:

35...♜xb8 36 ♙xb8 b4 37 ♜d3 ♙h6 38 f4 g5 39 g4 hxg4 40 hxg4 gxf4 41 exf4 1-0

“Thus to the question of whether, in evaluating a position, the factor of the presence of the two bishops for one of the opponents should be taken into account as a particular aspect of the advantage, the right reply, in our view, will be no, it should not. This particular aspect of the advantage does not exist.”

Well, there is a good point hidden behind Roinanovsky's rather bizarre presentation, which is that, as any good player will tell you, the bishop-pair can be either strong or weak, depending upon the position. But in general,

this old debate is no longer such a heated one. In a majority of cases, modern players prefer the two bishops for the very good reason that they tend to win games. Those rare, completely locked positions, or the more frequent ones in which the side with the knights have countervailing advantages, are a different matter. But the simple fact is that the bishops are better in more positions than not, as I will show next.

Let's examine some database statistics on 2♙ vs 2♞, and then 2♙ vs ♙+♞. The first thing to test is pure endings, i.e., those with no other pieces. With even pawns, the two bishops win against two knights about 40% of the time for **either** Black or White, whereas the knights win only 15% of the time. This yields a hefty 63%/37% winning ratio in both cases. Now the normal winning percentage for White/Black is 54%/46% ratio; so the bishop-pair creates a 9% improvement for White over the usual percentages, and an amazing 17% improvement for Black! When we take all cases of two bishops versus two knights, with even material, but including queens and rooks, the winning ratio for the bishops is 62%/38% with White and 57%/43% with Black. (All these statistics assume that the conditions of 2♙ vs 2♞ and level material last at least 6 half-moves). It is worth pointing out that part of this last winning percentage for the bishop-pair is probably due to the fact that the possessor of the knight-pair will do almost anything to avoid the pure ending (without other pieces), and may take risky steps to avoid it. Finally, I should mention Mayer's observation that Chigorin himself, the two-knights defender, scored only 29%/71% in games in which he himself had the knight-pair versus two bishops.

The 2♙ vs ♙+♞ case is similarly successful for the bishops. With no other pieces, White's winning ratio is 64%/36%; interestingly, this includes wins for Black (with the bishop and knight) in only 8% of the games! When Black has the two bishops versus White's bishop and knight (again with no other pieces), his percentage is a hefty 62%/38%. When queens and rooks are included (but with even material), White's winning ratio with the bishop-pair goes to 61%/39%, still well above the 54%/46% norm; and Black's (also with the bishops) is 54%/46%, 8% above average.

Finally, what influence does a material imbalance have? In the 2♙ vs 2♘ case, let's give the bishops an extra pawn. Then White (with 2♙+♗) achieves a staggering winning percentage of 88%/12% in the ending without other pieces, and 78%/22% when other pieces are included. The parallel figures with White having two knights plus a pawn versus Black's two bishops are much lower, at 66%/34% and 60%/40% respectively. The 2♙ vs ♙+♘ results are also powerfully in the bishops' favour: when White has the two bishops and extra pawn, for example, his winning percentage is 87%/13% without other pieces, and 78%/22% with them. But when White has the bishop, knight and extra pawn against Black's two bishops, his corresponding winning percentages are only 63%/37% and 61%/39%, respectively. It's obvious that the two bishops help in defence as well as in creating winning chances.

So in the ending or not, the bishops are indeed a potent force, justifying the preferences

of nearly every modern player. It is particularly interesting to see the almost excessive winning percentages for Black, which presumably arise because the influence of the first move has faded by the time that Black acquires the bishops, and possibly also because modern openings tend to yield Black the bishop-pair under favourable circumstances more often than they do White. The important thing is that the bishop-pair is statistically superior under all of the above material distributions. Protests from the likes of Flesch and Romanovsky notwithstanding, I believe that we can consider this old debate as resolved. While it bears repeating that the strength of the bishops or knights is dependent upon the particular features of the position, it is also true that in a majority of actually arising positions, the two bishops will beat either the knight-pair or a bishop and knight.

In the next chapter, we take up the case of the knight, and how its role has changed in modern times.

5 The Contemporary Knight

The knight has traditionally been the most difficult piece to handle, for the professional as well as the amateur. Its movement is the least 'natural' of the pieces, and threats from it are more easily overlooked than from other pieces (Larsen once commented that it was good to have the knight-pair in blitz games!). Not surprisingly, the use of knights has changed along with the rest of the game. In this chapter, I will examine how the knight as an individual piece has seen its role change in modern times.

They Live on the Edge

Instructional texts generally include some horrific example of a knight which is stuck on the edge of the board, cut off from the rest of the play, haplessly watching as its owner is condemned to play effectively a piece down. They duly cite Tarrasch's comment about knights which, loosely translated, goes "knights on the rim are grim"; and consider the lesson well taught. The innocent student files away this gem of wisdom and keeps his knights in the centre thenceforth.

But in modern chess, the good players have a thoroughly pragmatic attitude towards this old saw, and don't hesitate to use knights on the edge of the board when it serves their purpose. Right off, I should note that this lawless attitude towards the horses applies primarily to the middlegame and opening. Tisdall's comment about rules in chess tending to retain more validity in the ending applies here as well; certainly a well-centralized knight tends to show its superiority when there are few other pieces on the board.

During the rest of the struggle, however, the player who ignores the side of the board for his knights, merely on principle, only cripples his ability to deal with positions optimally. This is best shown by example, so we turn to a number of well-established modern openings and early middlegames in which a knight serves a positive function out on the rim. It might be

appropriate to begin with the example almost always given to show how *bad* a rim knight can be: the Panno/Yugoslav Variation of the g3 King's Indian Defence. This begins with:

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♙g7 4 g3 0-0 5 ♙g2 d6 6 ♘f3 ♘c6!?

Since we are on the subject of knights and modern chess, I should mention that this type of development was definitely frowned upon until the 1950s or thereabouts, although it is quite conventional now. In main line King's Indians in the 1920s, Yates had tried ...♘c6 and after d5, ...♘b8, to regroup via ...♘bd7 and ...♘c5, but this proved too slow; so Black used ideas with ...e5, ...c5, and/or ...♘bd7 for some 30 years thereafter. No one dared to challenge Tarrasch's dictum with the impudent move ...♘a5; today, it appears in a number of KID lines.

7 0-0 a6

More effrontery! Black prepares ...♗b8 and ...b5, to chip away at the classic white centre. Again, we accept such notions without blinking an eye today, but in Lasker's day, only patzers would neglect both their development and occupation of the centre in such a manner.

8 d5

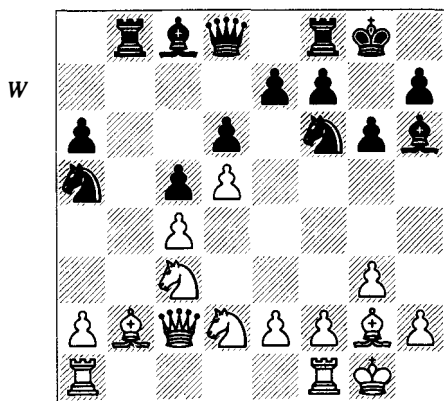
A recent example of the sustained influence of a knight on a5 was Karpov-Shirov, Amber rapid, Monte Carlo 1998: 8 ♖e1 ♗b8 9 ♗b1 ♗e8 10 d5 ♘a5 11 ♘d2 c5 12 a3 ♘g4 13 ♗c2 ♘e5 14 b3 b5 15 h3 bxc4 16 bxc4 ♗xb1 17 ♘cxb1 ♗b6 18 ♘c3 ♙f5! 19 e4 ♙d7 20 ♘d1 ♗b8 (threatening to fully justify the knight's placement by ...♘b3) 21 f4 (this appears positionally decisive, but the inherent dynamism in Black's position allows him to strike back) 21...♙a4!! 22 ♗xa4 ♘d3 23 ♘f3 ♘xe1 24 ♘xe1 ♗b1 25 ♗xa5 ♗xc1 26 ♙f3 ♙d4+ 27 ♘h2 ♗b3 28 h4 ♗xa3 29 ♗d8+ ♘g7 30 e5 ♗d2+ 31 ♘g2 ♗xf3 32 ♗xe7 dxe5 33 h5 ♗xd1 0-1.

8...♘a5

There it stands, grimly attacking c4! The fight for that point will determine how effective

Black's strategy can be. At any rate, retreat by 8 ... b8 would be inconsistent with ... a6 , and Black's pieces would only get in each other's way on the first rank.

9 d2 c5 10 c2 b8 11 b3 b5 12 a2 b2 bxc4 13 bxc4 a6 (D)



This position has been a main line for almost 40 years, in spite of White's continued efforts to refute it. Black's last move is designed to provoke weaknesses in White's camp by means of the threat ... a5 -knight to capture on c4). To this day, both sides are willing to go into this position and, as far as I can make out from books and recent practice (1998), Black has full equality. That is particularly ironic, since middlegame texts so often use this variation to demonstrate the weakness of a knight on the rim.

The idea of condemning a piece to a 'bad' square (in this case, the knight to a5) at an early stage, in order to spend much of the middlegame trying to liberate it, should remind the reader of the 'bad' bishops in the last chapter, e.g., the one on g7 blocked by a pawn on e5. As in that case, when the 'bad' piece returns to action, it often does so with a vengeance, gaining an advantage for the side we had been pitying. Let's look at a couple of recent examples of this middlegame:

14 f4

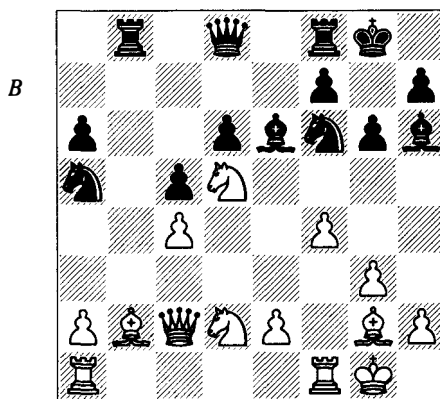
Since 14 e3 is met by 14... a5 !, White tries to retain the option of e4 .

14... e5 15 dxe6

Both 15 a6 and 15 a1 can be answered by 15... exf4 16 gxf4 d5 ! (another knight on the rim!), when current theory has Black equalizing

easily. Analysis by Kasparov illustrates both the knight's influence on c4 and modern dynamism: 15 a1 exf4 16 gxf4 d5 17 e3 g7 18 d1 f5 19 e4 xb2 20 dxb2 bxb2 21 xb2 xc4 22 dxc4 xe4 with unclear play. Black is fine in that case; compare this with what follows.

15... xe6 16 d5 (D)



16... xb2 !

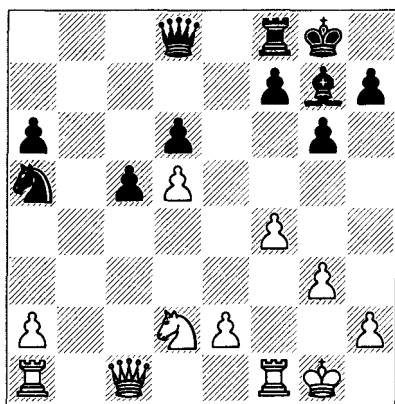
Here is one reason that I wanted to use this example. The modern exchange sacrifice for positional pressure (and/or attack) is the subject of an entire chapter (Chapter 8 below), and it can't hurt to see another example here. As with many such sacrifices, Black's compensation comes from a powerful unopposed bishop (here the dark-squared one) and a certain looseness in the enemy camp (squares like e3, d4, and c4 are lightly guarded, and the pawn on d5 after ... a5 -knight can also be vulnerable).

In the classic Botvinnik, Reshevsky, and Portisch victories as White in this line (often accompanied by lectures about how Black misplaced his knight on a5), the second player didn't avail himself of this sacrificial opportunity, or of other similar ones (e.g., ... b4 and after a3, ... xc4 , with a pawn and pressure for the exchange). Modern chess is not only pragmatic, it is dynamic and opportunistic!

17 xb2 a7 18 c1 d5 19 d5 dxd5 20 cxd5 (D)

This position has been debated for years, with both sides achieving nice victories, but the overall assessment remains unclear. The following example features an idea for Black which has proved effective recently:

B



Stohl – Kindermann
Bundesliga 1996/7

20...♖e7!

But in fact, 20...♘d4+ also seems to give Black enough compensation, e.g., 21 ♖h1 (21 ♔g2? ♗e8! is very strong for Black) 21...♗a8 22 e4, Stohl-Babula, Czech Cht 1996/7, and here Stohl gives 22...♘a1 23 ♗xa1 f5 with plenty of play, e.g., 24 ♖c3 fxe4! 25 ♗xa5 ♗xd5 26 ♘b3 e3+ 27 ♔g1 g5! 28 ♗e1 c4 29 ♘c1 ♗d2, or, similarly, 24 ♗d1 ♗e8 25 ♖c3 fxe4! 26 ♗xa5 ♗xd5 27 ♗a4 e3+ 28 ♔g1 ♔f8 with the idea ...e2, probably leading to a draw.

21 ♖b1

Not 21 e4? ♘d4+ 22 ♖h1 ♘a1 23 ♗xa1 ♘c4! and Black will be a pawn up with the better pawn structure.

21...♗xe2 22 ♗d1 ♗e3+ 23 ♖h1 ½-½

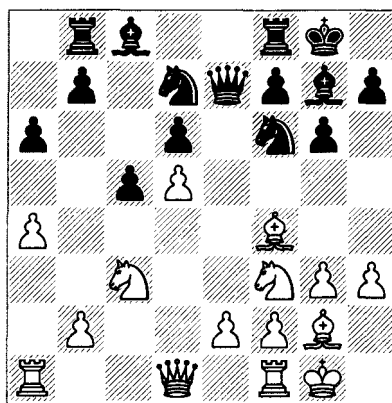
Black's idea was 23...♘c4!. Then after 24 ♘xc4 (24 ♗b3 ♗xd2 25 ♗xc4 ♗e8 is no better) 24...♗e4+ 25 ♗f3 ♗xc4, Black has a pawn for the exchange. White's weak pawns on d5 and a2, along with his somewhat exposed king, make for a dynamically balanced game which will very likely be drawn.

The point is not whether Black has equality in this opening; theory tends to revise its judgments continually about such things. But at least it should be obvious from these examples that the knight on a5 has both advantages and disadvantages, and that a host of factors, both static and dynamic, will decide who comes out on top, as opposed to a narrow and simplistic rule.

In many variations of the Modern Benoni Defence, the queen's knight goes to the flank

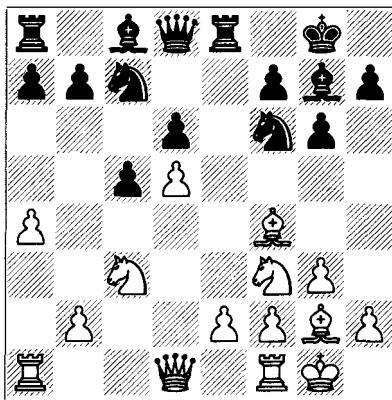
square a6. Since it then often goes to c7, one might wonder how Black can spend two tempi to relocate a piece which looks perfectly natural on d7. Let's compare this placement with the more conventional one and see why:

W



Here's an example of White's g3 set-up versus ...♘bd7. The d7-knight restrains the white e-pawn from advancing by e4-e5, but lends no support to the ...b5 idea.

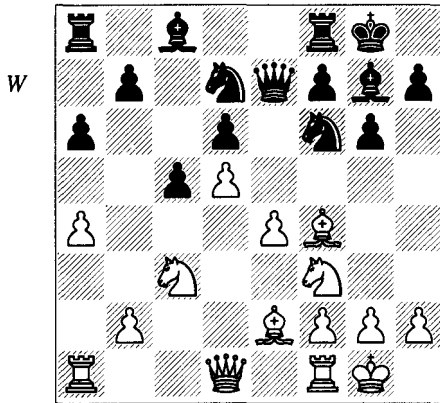
W



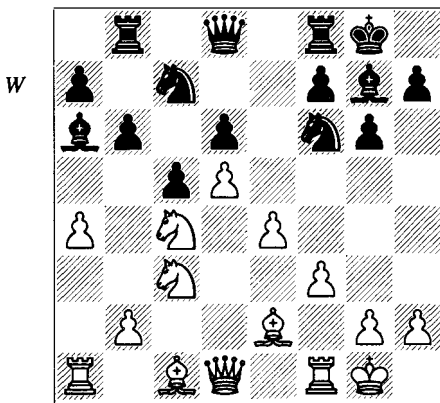
Here the knight has gone from a6 to c7 (in some cases, an a6-knight may go to b4, or to c5, after ...c4). White's e4-e5 plan is no longer directly restrained, but prophylactically, i.e., such an advance will expose the white d-pawn to attack after ...dxe5. In the meantime, the c7-knight directly supports ...b5. If White rushes a knight to c4, Black can bring his other knight to the rim as well by 12 ♘d2 ♘h5! 13 ♗e3 ♗xe3! 14 fxe3 ♗h6, and Black has enough compensation, according to Psakhis. This is another example of the positional exchange sacrifice, easy

to play here due to White's horrible g2-bishop and his shattered, backward e-pawns.

In the main line ♖f3 Benoni, there are similar trade-offs:



Once again, Black stops e5 directly, but his queen's bishop still lacks a role. To avoid this, Black often plays ...♗g4 and ...♗xf3 before ...♖bd7. That line has a good theoretical standing, although Black gives up his bishop-pair. A similar concession occurs in the ...♖a6 main line. After ...♖a6-c7, this position can arise:



Again, the c7-knight restrains e5 by attacking d5, and also supports ...b5. As in the ...♖bd7 lines, Black will normally concede the bishop-pair to get his queenside moving, by ...♗xc4, followed by ...a6 and ...b5. Here ...♖d7 and ...♗e8 are often also played, to restrain White's e-pawn further. Needless to say, although plenty of players prefer ...♖bd7 in these positions, no one talks about the knight on the rim as being a violation of fundamental principle.

A knight also goes to a6 (instead of d7 or c6) in so many modern lines of the King's Indian Defence that no one blinks an eye any more. Here are a few obvious examples (mostly in established main lines):

a) Four Pawns: 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 f4 0-0 6 ♖f3 ♖a6;

b) Averbakh: 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♗e2 0-0 6 ♗g5 ♖a6;

c) Classical: 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♖f3 0-0 6 ♗e2 e5 7 0-0 ♖a6 (very popular at the moment);

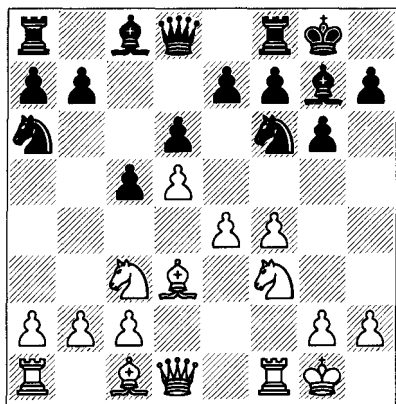
d) Exchange Variation: 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♖f3 0-0 6 ♗e2 e5 7 dxe5 dxe5 8 ♗xd8 ♗xd8 9 ♗g5 c6 10 ♖xe5 ♗e8 11 0-0-0 ♖a6;

e) Classical Fianchetto: 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 ♗g7 4 ♖f3 d6 5 g3 0-0 6 ♗g2 c6 7 0-0 ♖a6 8 e4 e5.

The interesting thing is that, despite the use of all of the above white systems for many years, only recently (in the last 10 years) have the lines with ...♖a6 attracted any serious attention. Surely this has to do with the old dogmas about knights on the rim. The reader may ask: OK, but why put the knight off on the side, where it doesn't control the key e5- and d4-squares? There are several reasons. For one thing, such a knight doesn't interfere with the development of the queen's bishop, no small issue. Also, c7 is defended, which can be important in lines where White chooses dxe5 (since after ...dxe5 and the exchange of queens, ♖b5 or ♖d5 will attack that square). Furthermore a knight on a6 can swing powerfully into action via c5 (as after ...♖bd7, but not after ...♖c6), or it can come back to c7 to support a possible ...b5 break. Naturally, putting the knight on a6 is not a complete solution to Black's problems in the King's Indian; but those conversant with KID theory will recognize that the above lines are quite as good as those with more classically-developed knights.

Sticking with knights on a6 for a moment, the Austrian Attack of the Pirc Defence goes 1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♘f6 3 ♖c3 g6 4 f4 ♗g7 5 ♖f3 0-0 6 ♗d3, and now 6...♖c6 was used for years. In modern play, however, 6...♖a6 7 0-0 c5 has become perfectly respectable. After 8 d5 (D) the following line reveals two advantages of ...♖a6:

B



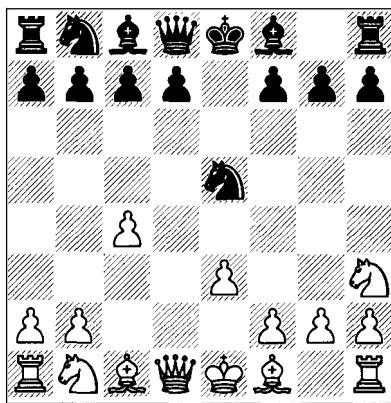
8...♘g4 (this piece remains free to develop, as opposed to after ...♘bd7 or ...♘fd7) 9 ♖e1 ♘b4! (showing that ...♘c7 and ...b5 is not Black's only idea) 10 ♖h4 c4! 11 ♙xc4 ♘xc2 12 ♙b1 ♙xf3 13 ♙xf3 ♙c8 14 ♙b3 ♘d4 15 ♙h3 ♘xb3 16 axb3 h5, and White's attack is broken, whereas Black can go after the weak queenside pawns (...♙b6+ threatens).

A last ...♘a6 example (although there are more in several other openings) comes up in the very technical Double Fianchetto line of the Symmetrical English. After 1 c4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 g3 b6 4 ♙g2 ♙b7 5 0-0 g6 6 b3 ♙g7 7 ♙b2 0-0 8 ♘c3, 8...♘a6! is a lot easier than, for example, 8...♘c6 9 d4 ♘xd4 10 ♘xd4 ♙xg2 11 ♙xg2 cxd4 12 ♙xd4 or 8...d5 9 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 10 ♙xg7 ♙xg7 11 cxd5 ♙xd5 12 d4. After 8...♘a6, dxc5 will always be answered by ...♘xc5, and the b7-bishop continues to oppose White's g2-bishop directly. White has made no serious progress here, e.g., 9 d4 d5 10 ♘e5 (10 dxc5 ♘xc5 11 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 12 ♙xg7 ♙xg7 13 cxd5 ♙xd5 is equal) 10...e6 11 dxc5 ♘xc5 12 cxd5 exd5 13 ♘f3 ♙d7! 14 ♙c1 ♙fe8 15 ♙c2 ♙ad8 with equality, Ftačnik-Speelman, Thessaloniki Olympiad 1984. Such boring but effective lines elevated the Double Fianchetto Defence to a main line, used by Kasparov in his 1984/5 match with Karpov.

White can also place *his* queen's knight on a3 or h3, of course. In various lines of the Alapin Sicilian (1 e4 c5 2 c3), this is an important idea, e.g., 1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 ♙xd5 4 d4 ♘f6 5 ♘f3 ♙g4 6 dxc5! ♙xc5 7 h3 ♙h5 8 ♘a3, or 1 e4 c5 2 c3 ♘f6 3 e5 ♘d5 4 d4 ♘c6 5 ♘f3 cxd4 6 ♙c4 ♘b6 7 ♙b3 d5 8 exd6 ♙xd6 9 ♘a3!?. But in general, this is not a major theme

for White in 1 e4 openings, if only because the first player tends to occupy the centre directly in so many lines. Development with ♘h3 occurs in some English Opening lines (e.g., 1 c4 e5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 g3 g6 4 ♙g2 ♙g7 5 d3 d6 6 ♘h3!?), and it has gained widespread acceptance against the Dutch Defence. This latter case provides an interesting contrast of philosophies. In a variation such as 1 d4 f5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 g3 g6 4 ♙g2 ♙g7 5 0-0 0-0 6 c4 d6 7 ♘c3, White uses the f3-knight for direct suppression of ...e5 and control of d4, whereas the set-up 1 d4 f5 2 g3 ♘f6 3 ♙g2 g6 4 c4 ♙g7 5 ♘h3 tries to leave the g2-bishop's diagonal unobstructed, and fights against ...e5 by positional means, e.g., 5...0-0 6 0-0 d6 7 d5, when ...e5 allows dxe6, and the h3-knight comes efficiently into play via f4. Such a choice is more a matter of taste than of objective superiority. Another interesting recent example arises in the Budapest Defence after 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e5 3 dxe5 ♘g4 4 e3 ♘xe5 5 ♘h3!? (D).

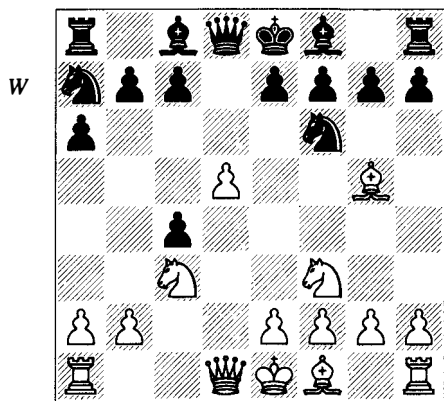
B



For some reason ('knights on the rim are grim?'), White neglected this extremely logical move until recently. It aims the knight at the critical d5-square (after ♘f4), rather than exchanging it after ♘f3, which is hardly inspiring.

Sometimes knights on the rim support specific positional goals, so that their placement is relatively uncontroversial. In the Nimzo-Indian after ...♙xc3, and White recapturing by bxc3, Black's b8-knight goes to a5 almost as a matter of course, e.g., 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 e3 c5 5 a3 ♙xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♘c6 7 ♙d3 0-0 8 ♘e2 b6 9 e4 ♘e8 10 ♙e3 ♙a6 11 ♘g3 ♘a5! (to

force White into d5) 12 ♖e2 ♜c8 13 d5 (now the white bishops are static and prospectless) 13...♗h4 14 0-0 ♘d6 15 ♜ad1 f5, and Black was better in Geller-Smyslov, Candidates tournament, Amsterdam 1956. But we also see some very imaginative uses of knights on the rim, as in this idea: 1 d4 d5 2 c4 ♘c6 3 ♘c3 dxc4 4 ♘f3 ♘f6 5 ♙g5 a6!? 6 d5 ♘a7! (D).

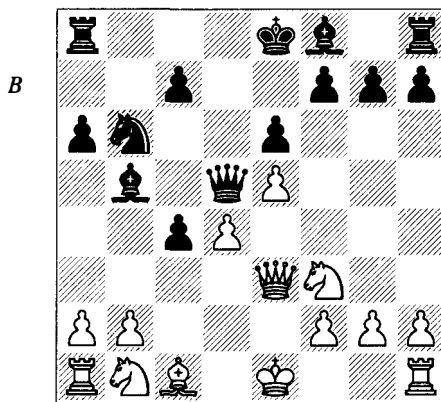


This is a purely pragmatic move: Black threatens to defend his pawn by ...b5, but also wants to undermine White's support for his centre by ...♘b5, exchanging the important c3-knight. For example, 7 e4 ♘b5 8 ♗c2 ♘xc3 9 bxc3 b5 10 a4 ♙b7 11 ♘d4, Pieterse-Boersma, Amsterdam 1986, and now 11...♗d7 is a good move, but Black sacrificed a piece for three pawns by 11...♘xd5!? 12 exd5 ♗xd5 13 ♘f3! e5 14 ♜d1 ♗e4+ 15 ♗xe4 ♙xe4 16 ♜a1 ♙d6 17 axb5 axb5 18 ♜xa8+ ♙xa8 with complex and roughly equal play. The idea of ...♘a7 was neglected in this variation until just recently, but is more logical than previously-played moves.

For my last examples within the realm of opening theory, I have to mention two amusing cases of very early knight moves which are receiving serious attention: the Sicilian Defence with 1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙b5 ♘a5!? (preparing ...a6 and ...b5), and the Grünfeld Defence with 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 d5 4 cxd5 ♘xd5 5 ♘a4!? (preventing ...c5 and threatening 6 e4). At the time of writing, there are strong grandmasters playing both lines. Note that they are moving their only developed piece twice as well as violating Tarrasch's dictum!

To conclude this section, Kosikov offers this nice middlegame example of a pragmatic knight

move to the rim (from *Training for the Tournament Player*, p. 130):



Agzamov – Kosikov
Leningrad 1972

Kosikov relates his thought-process:

"Imagine what a powerful battery will be set up when the bishop comes to c6. Of course, it is desirable to maintain the queen on a central square, and this means that it is necessary to take steps to combat ♘c3. You suggest exchanging the dark-squared bishop for the knight on c3? You know, this idea is not particularly good, because the white bishop will come out to a3."

So instead, Kosikov played simply...

13...♘a4!

He comments: "Moves to the edge of the board can be quite good if they are associated with a logical idea." The game continued:

14 ♘c3 ♘xc3 15 bxc3 ♙c6!

Kosikov talks at length about this decision, but the remark that is most relevant to us concerns the alternative 15...c5: "But what is the point? You wish to get rid of the doubled pawn. But in what respect is my pawn on c7 inferior to the pawn on c3? I don't see it." Note the thoroughly pragmatic attitude towards doubled pawns: if they aren't bad, who cares? As discussed elsewhere in this book, if you make a blanket rule about doubled pawns being weak, you will miss out on their proper treatment.

Anyway, after 15...♙c6, play went 16 0-0 ♜b8 17 ♜e1 (versus ...♗e4) 17...♙e7 18 h4 h5! (intending ...♜h6-g6-g4) 19 ♗e2 g5! 20 ♙xg5 ♙xg5 21 hxg5 h4, and the idea of ...h3 cracked

open the long diagonal (with the unopposed bishop), leading to a decisive advantage for Black. The mini-leap to the rim by ...♖a4, to maintain the light squares regardless of the 'principles of development', was crucial for Black's whole plan.

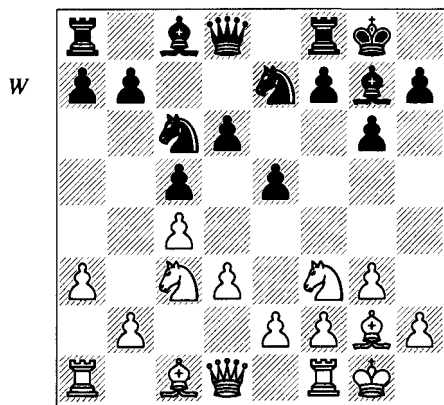
We could go on forever, but the point should be obvious by now. Modern players have no inhibitions about placing knights on the edge of the board, for the simple reason that they serve active functions there, and can combine with other pieces and ideas in an optimal manner. The old days of dogmatic knight centralization are forever gone.

Optical Illusions

There have been some interesting developments in the assessment and use of knight outposts. Increasingly, players allow attractive knights to nestle in their position, because those knights achieve little and/or are only established by allowing concessions elsewhere. We will discuss similar issues in later chapters, but here I would like to look at examples of what Mayer calls 'the overrated knight', and in particular, cases of what Dvoretsky calls 'the superfluous piece' (in this case, the superfluous knight).

The English Opening and Sicilian Defence provide some well-known examples of outposts which appear stronger than they are. Here is an example from the English Opening:

1 c4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♗c6 3 ♗c3 g6 4 g3 ♗g7 5 ♗g2 e5 6 0-0 ♗ge7 7 d3 0-0 8 a3 d6 (D)



Black's set-up (which is often used by White as well) concedes the d5-square right away (on

move 5), without obvious compensation. But it turns out that a white knight on that square doesn't do that much by itself. In fact, from where it is on c3, White's knight ties down ...b5 by Black and has the option of swinging to e4 or d5; so it may happen that the knight is worse-placed on d5 in some lines.

9 ♖b1 a5 10 ♗d2

In the early days, White often rushed his other knight to e3 via e1 and c2, concentrating completely on the d5 weakness: 10 ♗e1 ♗e6 (now that ♗g5 is not an answer) 11 ♗d5 ♖b8 12 ♗c2 b5 13 ♗ce3 ♗d7.

OK, so White has got his knight to d5 and supported it, both with the other knight and with his g2-bishop. But where is his play? It is Black who has all the natural breaks: ...b5 (which he has already achieved) and ...f5. Barcza-Uhlmann, Sarajevo 1969 illustrates how the second player's activity is more important than the lone outpost: 14 cxb5 ♖xb5 15 a4 ♖bb8 16 ♗xe7+ ♗xe7 17 ♗c4 ♗c6 18 ♗d2 e4! 19 ♗xa5 ♗xa5 20 ♗xa5, and among other moves, Uhlmann suggests 20...♗b3! 21 ♗d2 ♗a2 22 ♖bc1 ♖xb2 with a clear advantage for Black.

10...♖b8 11 ♗e1 ♗e6 12 ♗d5

White reluctantly occupies the outpost, because 12 ♗c2 allows 12...d5.

12...b5 13 ♗xe7+ ♗xe7 14 cxb5 ♖xb5 15 b4 axb4 16 axb4 c4!

...and Black was better (superior centre) in Csom-Hartoch, Skopje Olympiad 1972.

The main line of the Sveshnikov Sicilian provides an example of a rather powerful white knight on d5 *vis-à-vis* a backward pawn on an open file. Again, Black often just 'works around' the knight and obtains activity for his two bishops and rooks. For example, in the following game, I don't think that White was worse in the early middlegame, but there is something impressive about one of the world's top players getting run off the board while he calmly rearranges his two 'ideal' knights around d5:

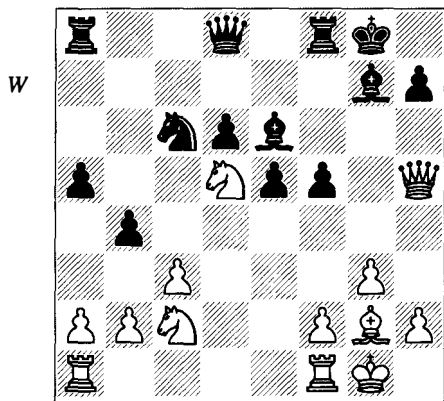
Topalov – Krasenkov
Polanica Zdroj 1995

1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♗c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♗f6 5 ♗c3 e5 6 ♗db5 d6 7 ♗g5 a6 8 ♗a3 b5 9 ♗xf6

gxf6 10 ♖d5 f5 11 c3 ♗g7 12 exf5 ♗xf5 13 ♖c2 ♗e6 14 g3 0-0 15 ♗g2 a5 16 0-0 f5

These ...a5 and ...f5 moves, normally to be followed by ...e4 and/or ...b4, remind one of the ...b5 and ...f5 breaks in the Symmetrical English example above. Black advances on the flanks, 'around' the knights, rather than contesting it directly.

17 ♖h5 b4! (D)



18 ♖ce3

As in the last game, both knights proudly cooperate to maintain the outpost. Here 18 cxb4 axb4 19 ♖cxb4 ♖xb4 20 ♖xb4 allows 20...e4! with threats and activity.

18...bxc3 19 bxc3 ♖h8 20 ♖ad1 ♖b8 21 ♖h3 ♖d7 22 f4 e4 23 ♖h1

Criticized by Krasenkov, who preferred 23 ♖d2.

23...♖b2 24 ♖c4?

White begins to flail, hoping for a tactical solution.

24...♖xa2 25 ♖de3

25 ♖xd6 allows 25...♖d4! or 25...♗d4! and in either case Black is clearly better.

25...♗f7!

Suddenly Black has a big advantage; what good did the d5-square do for White?

26 ♗g5 ♗xc4 27 ♖xc4 d5 28 ♖e5

28 ♖b6 ♖b7; 28 ♖e3 ♖e7.

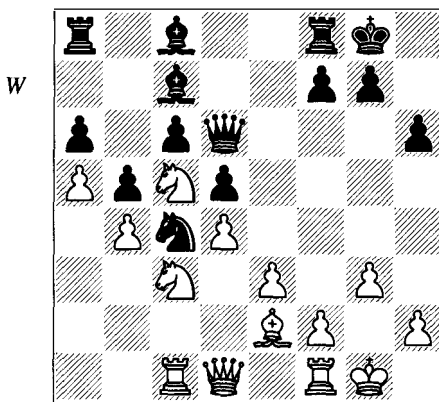
28...♗e6! 29 g4??

A blunder, but 29 ♖b1 ♖xe5 30 fxe5 ♗g6 was also decisive.

29...♗xe5 30 fxe5 ♗xe5 31 ♗g2 f4 0-1

The following game provides a good example of how an ideal knight outpost, even with

the bishop-pair, can be meaningless if its radius of influence isn't relevant:



Karpov – Spassky

Candidates match (game 11), Leningrad 1974

Black's c4-knight not only looks entrenched and unassailable, but it also cuts off White's normal activity on the queenside. Admittedly, White also has a powerful knight on c5, and he has a break in the centre with 21 e4. But up to the end of this game, none of Black's pieces are formally 'bad', and the c4-knight sits sublimely unperturbed. Unfortunately, it also never exerts any influence upon the game:

21 e4 ♗h3 22 ♖e1 dxe4 23 ♖3xe4 ♗g6 24 ♗h5 ♖h7 25 ♖f3!

Now White has the threat not only of g4, but also of ♖c3. Black's next move, winning a piece, exposes his position too drastically, but in any case, he is much worse.

25...f5? 26 ♖c3 g6 27 ♖xc6 gxf5 28 ♖d5!

Suddenly everything hangs, especially in view of ♖e7. The rest is desperation:

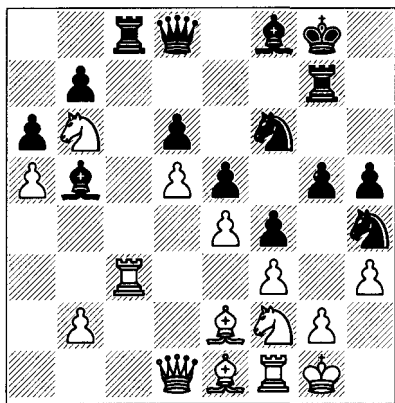
28...f4 29 ♖e7 ♖f5

Also hopeless is 29...fxg3 30 ♖f6+! ♖xf6 31 ♖xa8+ ♖f8 32 ♖xf8+, etc.

30 ♖xc7 ♖ae8 31 ♖xh6 ♖f7 32 ♖xf7 ♖xf7 33 ♖xf4 ♖e2 34 ♖c7+ ♖f8 35 ♖f4 1-0

A final point to make about overrated knights has to do with knight outposts on the sixth rank. Traditionally (following a comment by Marshall), knight outposts on the sixth rank have been considered towers of strength, and barring a quick exchange of the infiltrating steed, the defence was supposed to crumble in

short order. To be fair, knights on the sixth, if well-secured, can be very powerful. But players and annotators today are aware that this is just a probabilistic advantage, not a hard-and-fast rule. Any number of players in their notes have made the point that sometimes, such advanced knights merely spectate while the action takes place elsewhere. It has also been remarked upon that the farther the advanced knight is from the centre (assuming that it isn't parked right in front of the enemy king), the less effective that knight is likely to be. Time and again in modern chess, we see a white knight that has laboriously ensconced itself at b6 only to have Black overrun the white king on the other side of the board, in part due to the forlorn absence of the now-distant knight for defence. So that the reader has something to relate to, I would point to the many main-line King's Indians with c4-c5, ...a6, and then an exchange on d6 followed by ♖c4-b6 or ♖a4-b6, as in this position:



Zaltsman - Evans

USA Ch, Greenville 1980

25...♖xc3 26 ♖xc3 ♖e8!

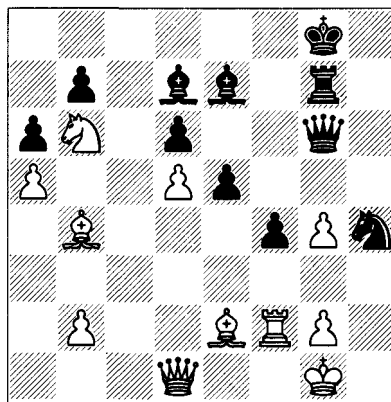
The knight on b6 is far from the kingside action, and Black's attack is already close to decisive there.

27 ♖c4?

Rushing back to defend, which doesn't work out. 27 ♖xb5 ♖xb5 was only somewhat in Black's favour, according to Byrne and Mednis.

27...♖g6 28 ♖d3 ♖e7 29 ♖b4 g4! 30 fxg4 hxg4 31 hxg4 ♖d7! 32 ♖d1 ♖xe4 33 ♖xe4 ♖xe4 34 ♖f2 ♖g6! 35 ♖b6 (D)

B



Back again; this is forced, but probably a bad sign.

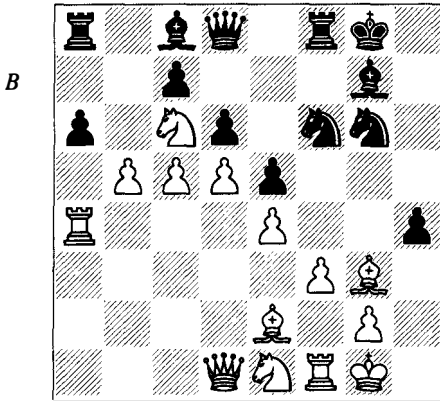
35...♖xg4 36 ♖xg4 ♖xg4 37 ♖xg4 ♖xg4 38 ♖c8 ♖g5 39 ♖xd6 39 ♖xd6 f3!.

39...e4 0-1

In view of 40 ♖f1 f3 41 gxf3 exf3 with the idea ...♖c4 or ...♖e3.

Similarly forlorn knights can arise from the Benko Gambit after 1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 b6. In some lines in which Black plays ...♖xb6, White rushes in with a4-a5 and ♖c4-b6 or ♖a4-b6, but then gets stuck. And naturally, the same ideas can apply when Black occupies b3: in the Advance Variation of the French Defence, for example, when White plays 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 ♖c6 5 ♖f3 ♖b6 6 a3. Then, after Black plays 6...c4 and at some point ...♖a5-b3, it can happen that the white pieces are able to avoid exchanges, shifting to the kingside and leaving the knight stranded on b3. Subsequently, f4-f5 can follow with effect.

My own pet peeve is with white knights on c6. Middlegame books tend to show examples of a capture of c6 with decisive effect (there are a couple of nice Botvinnik games, for example), and indeed, a c6 outpost can still win a lot of games. I will even admit that, in a clear majority of cases, it is better to have a knight supported on c6 than not. However, in many openings (I have King's Indians and English Openings in mind), the time and effort involved in winning c6 is too high a cost, and the knight just sits there looking around from its proud post while the real action takes place on the kingside, or perhaps somewhere on White's second rank.



Khuzman – Smirin
Sverdlovsk 1987

White has worked hard to bring a knight to c6, and it proves ... useless! After 24...♖d7 25 ♙h2 ♙h6!, White had to try 26 f4! ♜xf4, but Black's attack was still too strong after 27 bxa6 ♜g7 28 ♙xf4 ♙xf4. For another example of this idea, in which Black throws in an exchange to boot, see the Portisch-Petrosian excerpt in Chapter 8, in the section entitled 'Petrosian's Patent'.

I'm not even sure if this knight-on-the-sixth phenomenon is something which has changed with modern play, but the reader should know that a well-secured knight on d6 or e6 is far more likely to be dominant (or even advantageous) than one on c6, which in turn has a much better chance of being effective than one on b6. Naturally, I am assuming a position in which the kings have castled short, and I speak only of probabilities, not of a reliable rule upon which one can base one's play. The real point is that a clever player can lure a knight to an optically attractive post, and then exploit its absence from another part of the board, and that this happens relatively often in modern play.

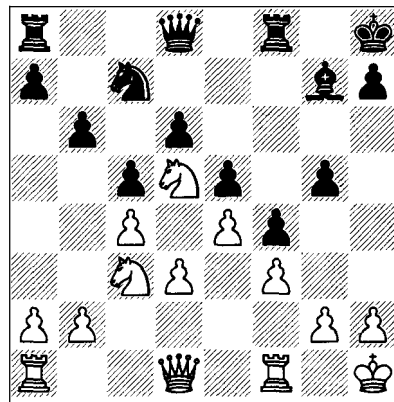
Are You Feeling Superfluous?

One of the most intriguing modern ideas that has actually been codified is the brainchild of the Russian super-trainer IM Mark Dvoretsky. He discusses positions in which one side conquers a key square (an outpost, for instance) and is able to occupy it with a number of pieces. Very often, he points out, a defender will more

or less blindly exchange at least one pair of pieces on that square, even though he cannot contest it enough times to rid himself of all the pieces which may eventually settle there. But the defender has an alternative strategy which is often superior. To quote Dvoretsky (from *Training for the Tournament Player*):

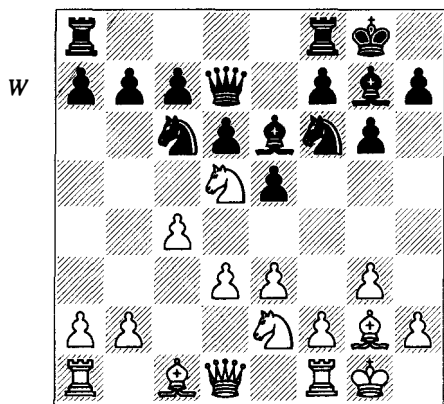
"If the square cannot be won back by means of exchanges, then one may ... forget about exchanges altogether (after all, only one of the opponent's pieces will be able to occupy the 'important high ground', and the others will turn out to be, so to speak, superfluous)."

He calls the multiple claimants to a single outpost 'superfluous pieces'. I think that this is a concept with broad application in modern chess. Suba gives a sort of skeletal example which throws the issues involved into sharp relief:

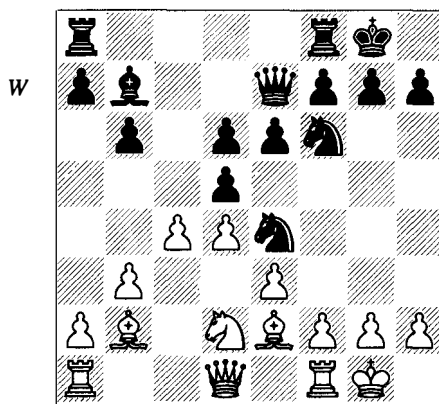


Suba comments: "White to move should play 1 ♜xc7 ♜xc7 2 ♜d5 with a clear advantage of a dominant knight against a bad bishop and automatic play on the queenside by b4, bxc5, etc. Black to move should avoid the exchange and make the knight on c3 superfluous, for example 1...♜e6!, keeping the game alive with good counterchances on the kingside."

It's surprising how often this theme arises, especially with knights (although there are good examples with rooks, they occur less frequently; and of course, there are also combinations of pieces which can occupy a square, such as knight and bishop). Dvoretsky quotes the following English Opening example, the basic idea of which occurs in any number of 1 c4 e5 variations:



Ubilava – Dvoretsky
Batumi 1969



Zukertort – Blackburne
London 1883

10 ♖b1

10 ♖c3 ♖e8! intends either ...♗h3 or ...♘d8 followed by ...c6. This last theme arises in many English Opening positions, and equalizes with consistency, because White's two knights have trouble finding two squares as good as c3!

10...♗h3 11 ♖c3 ♗xg2 12 ♗xg2 ♖h5!

Dvoretsky comments: "And here it turned out that there are two white knights competing for just one square (d5), and this is one too many. After 13 b4 f5 14 b5 ♘d8, my opponent had to deal with both 15...c6 and 15...f4." The game continued...

15 ♖e2 c6 16 bxc6 bxc6 17 ♗a4 ♗h8 18 f3 ♖e6 19 ♖dc3 ♗f7

...with a 'marked advantage' for Black, according to Dvoretsky.

An elegant middlegame example of this same idea, again drawn from Dvoretsky, is the following position (D):

Here Yusupov (in *Training for the Tournament Player*) comments: "I recently discussed this game with Mark Dvoretsky, and he drew my attention to the move 13 ♖b1!. A hundred years ago, of course, they didn't play such moves. This sort of positional manoeuvre ... first appeared at a later date ... By avoiding an exchange, White intends to drive the knight away from e4 with 14 f3 and then play ♖c3, preparing e3-e4 ... Similar situations sometimes occur in the English Opening or in the Dutch Defence, in the Stonewall System." As Yusupov also points out, the black knight on f6

is 'superfluous', and in general the knights are stepping all over each other after the simple 13 ♖b1!.

The reader will have no difficulty finding further games in which the superfluous knight plays a role (for those interested in annotated games, Mayer has some rather more complex examples in Chapter 7 of *Bishop versus Knight*). Dvoretsky's concept has been noticed and commented upon in various players' annotations, and is rapidly becoming part of the conscious conceptual arsenal of modern chess. In his *Improve Your Chess Now!* (a book with many sophisticated insights and a too-modest title), Tisdall makes a similar observation, which might even be considered a sort of generalization of Dvoretsky's idea: "The knight-pair are never happy protecting each other. Then, they step on each other's hooves, and reduce their own range. When protecting each other they often become paralysed in this configuration. They are best when employed side by side, when they can influence a virtual barrier of squares."

In conclusion, the treatment of knights in modern chess is not as stereotyped as textbooks would wish. Knights use the edge of the board regularly and with success. Furthermore, just on the basis of familiar openings, allowing one's opponent a seemingly dominant knight outpost for the sake of play 'around' that outpost is considerably on the increase. Finally,

knights can be superfluous, in that two of them may be competing for the only available outpost, so that one will end up being relatively

less effective. We will examine more of the knight's properties in the next chapter, in relation to its counterpart, the bishop.

6 Bishops versus Knights 1: One-on-One

In Chapter 4, we examined some issues relating to the bishop-pair; in particular, I presented an array of statistics demonstrating the superiority (in a probabilistic sense) of both two bishops versus two knights and two bishops versus bishop and knight, with or without material imbalance. In this and the next chapter, I want to continue our examination of minor-piece issues by looking at the modern treatment of bishops and knights, from the case of bishop versus knight to a more intricate examination of two bishops versus two knights. First, we will look at modern openings and middlegames in which one side trades a bishop for knight, and the issues that arise therefrom.

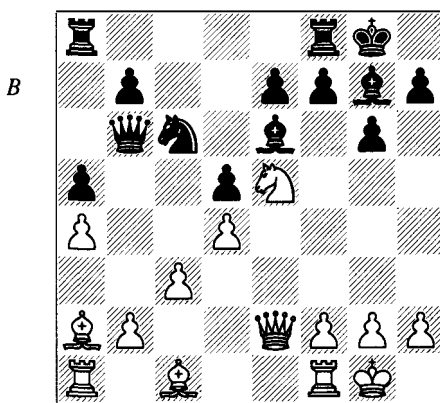
The Minor Pieces Face Off

The easiest way to assess a position between evenly-matched, strong players is to look at the relative value of their minor pieces. This is hardly a foolproof test, of course, but the importance of minor-piece play is constantly reflected in the annotations of grandmasters, in the discussions of positions in middlegame books, and in the explanations (when they exist) given by opening books about why a certain variation is to be preferred. One could even say that the biggest difference between two players' positional strength tends to reside in their handling of the minor pieces, especially in those positions in which bishops and knights face off. In this, as much as in any area, modern chess-players have discovered new and inventive ways to extract the maximum advantage from the imbalances created.

There isn't a great deal of theory associated with the simple case of one bishop versus a knight in a middlegame; the instructive manuals tend to use either a completely closed position (favouring the knight), or a fluid one in which the bishop has wonderful scope. The fact is that it is not practical to describe the multitude

of intermediate positions which the professional player must become accustomed to and hone his judgement about. Perhaps the first thing which we should consider is how likely it is that an ending will arise with one of the following configurations: ♖+♘ vs ♖+♞ (this is relatively rare; it was discussed in Part 1); ♜+♘ vs ♜+♞ (which Steve Mayer calls 'the grindable ending', the side with the bishop being better in most cases); 2♜+♘ vs 2♜+♞ (which several authors point out is even more favourable for the bishop); and finally, ♘ vs ♞ with only pawns. With the exception of the first (rather rare) case, these situations all tend (statistically) to favour the side with the bishop. With that in mind, we might conclude that it is in the interest of the side with the knight to achieve something concrete in the middlegame, for example, the crippling of his opponent's pawns, rendering the enemy bishop passive, or winning a permanent outpost.

Both Mayer and Dvoretsky consider the question of how the side with the knight can play to balance the scales. Mayer presents the following position:



E. Jimenez – Larsen
Palma de Mallorca 1967

Here Black (who stands reasonably well in any case) goes for the knight versus bishop:

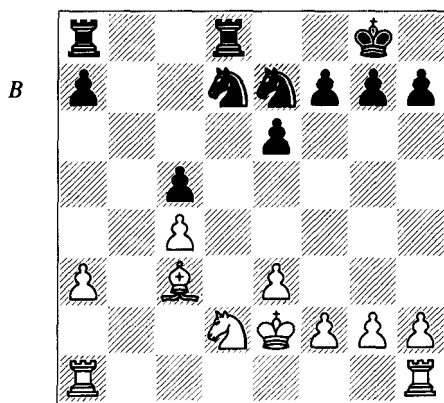
14...♗xe5!? 15 dxe5 d4!

Larsen exclaims: "Advantage for Black! He has the initiative in the centre and both the white king's pawn and his pawns on the queen-side are weak." The game continued:

16 ♖h6 ♜fd8 17 ♗xe6 fxe6 18 ♜fe1 ♞d5 19 ♗f4 ♜f8 20 g3 ♜f5

Now it is true that the bishop on f4 is moderately 'bad' (too many pawns on dark squares), and yet Black's weakened kingside and lack of a square for his knight (like b3 or c4) makes the assessment a bit unclear. After the correct move 21 h4! (which was not played), the problem with capturing a pawn on e5 is that Black's doubled e-pawns are then well and truly exposed. As a matter of principle, however, play in which the side with the knight grabs space and maintains some tension (as in this example) is generally preferable to drifting towards the ending, unless that side can achieve a strong and permanent outpost for his steed before he enters the pure ending phase.

Yusupov (in *Positional Play*, co-authored with Dvoretsky) gives two extremely interesting examples from his own games of the same bishop vs knight material imbalance. The contrast is instructive due to the very similar pawn structures in the two games (arising from completely different openings):



Yusupov – Lautier
Amsterdam 1994

White has a bishop-versus-knight situation, and Black has no obvious outposts. In top-flight

modern chess, it has become ever more critical for the owner of the knight in such situations to create immediate counterplay. If he fails to do so, the general outline of the game, repeated in countless contests, is as follows:

1) White (once the knights are restricted, or at least, relatively harmless) gains space with a general pawn advance on one side of the board.

2) The bishop and knight combination threatens to force a fatal weakness in Black's structure on that part of the board.

3) Ultimately, in desperation, the second player tries to counterattack, but the bishop proves its superiority in tactical situations with pawns on both sides of the board.

It is characteristic of the modern grandmaster that he can win such games with the bishop. Consider our recent world champions. What odds would one give any player with Black in such a position against Fischer, Karpov, or Kasparov? The fairly universal prejudice for the bishop among top players really began in earnest with Botvinnik, and has only increased since his time. Many of Fischer's most famous wins, for example, were with a bishop versus a knight. Nunn comments: "Everybody knows that in an open position a bishop is generally slightly better than a knight, but Fischer showed that this applies in a wider range of positions than was previously thought. He was particularly skilful in endings of rook and bishop against rook and knight, and won a number of these." Of course, since Fischer's time technique has only improved; and all the world's leading players are now adept at converting the bishop-versus-knight imbalance.

Returning to the diagram, let's look at this game to see both what happens and how Black might have better reacted:

15...♞c6?

Yusupov criticizes this move on the grounds that "the knight attacks nothing, prevents nothing, and is severely limited by the enemy bishop." He points out that this was Black's chance to use the knights against White's only weakness by placing them on b6 and d6. After 15...♞c8!, he believes that White only has a small advantage, for example, 16 ♜hb1 ♞d6 17 ♗a5 ♞dc8 18 ♜b3 ♞f8 19 f4 ♞e7 20 e4 f6! 21 ♜ab1 ♜ab8. This brings up the interesting point that, were both the white and black c-pawns

protected (say, by pawns on b3 and b6), White's advantage would be all the greater. Weak squares and isolated pawns tend to favour the knight, even if both sides have them in equal measure. I think that students tend to get confused about this point. They view a position with split pawns on both sides as more 'open' and therefore favourable to bishops. But in reality, what bishops tend to want is stability. That is because if short-term tactics are unavailable, then (in the absence of strong outposts) time generally favours the bishops. We will discuss this idea further as we get into the next chapter.

After 15...♖c6, the game continued:

16 ♖hb1 ♖ab8 17 ♖b5! a6

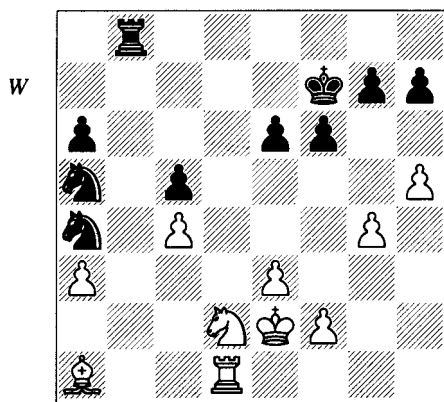
Weakening b6, but there was no choice.

18 ♖xb8 ♖xb8 19 g4!

White has a clear advantage.

19...f6 20 h4 ♖f7 21 h5 ♖b6 22 ♖d1 ♖a4 23 ♖a1 ♖a5? (D)

23...♖d8 24 f4 e5 25 fxe5 ♖xe5 26 ♖xe5 fxe5 27 ♖f1+ ♖e7 28 ♖e4 still leaves White with a large advantage – Yusupov.



24 ♖e4 ♖b6 25 g5 f5

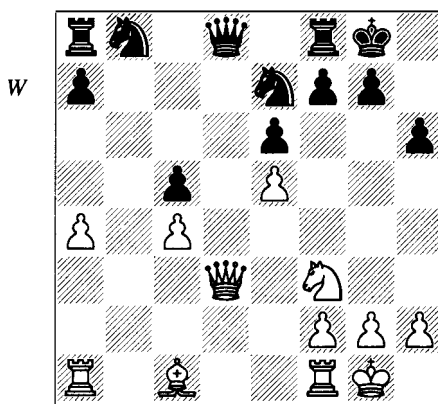
25...♖axc4 26 gxf6 gxf6 27 ♖xf6 h6 28 ♖g4.

26 ♖xc5 ♖axc4 27 ♖d7 ♖c8 28 ♖xb6 ♖xb6 29 ♖d6 ♖c2+ 30 ♖f3 ♖a2 31 ♖xg7 ♖c4 32 ♖d7+ ♖e8 33 ♖a7 ♖d6 34 g6 hxg6 35 h6 ♖e4 36 ♖g2 ♖xf2+

36...♖g5 37 ♖f6.

37 ♖g1 ♖d2 38 h7 ♖d1+ 39 ♖g2 ♖d2+ 40 ♖f1 1-0

A nice game for White, but also quite typical. Here is Yusupov's next example:



A. Sokolov – Yusupov

Candidates match (game 3), Riga 1986

What a difference it makes to have White's pawn on e5 instead of e3! Now Black *does* have a potential outpost (d4) for his knights; moreover, the e-pawn can be a target in some lines. Finally, White's bishop is restricted by that same pawn; compare the last example, in which pressure along the long diagonal had decisive effect on Black's kingside, even in a simplified position. These differences are not enough to give Black the advantage here; but as in the Larsen example above, they make the simple weakness-free bishop-versus-knight squeeze impossible, and give Black enough play to even the chances. Let's follow the game:

16 ♖e4

After 16 ♖d1 Yusupov gives 16...♖bc6!? 17 ♖e3 ♖a5, as well as the simpler 16...♖xd3 17 ♖xd3 ♖bc6 18 ♖e3 ♖fc8! with equality.

16...♖d7!

The c-pawn requires some care.

17 ♖b1?

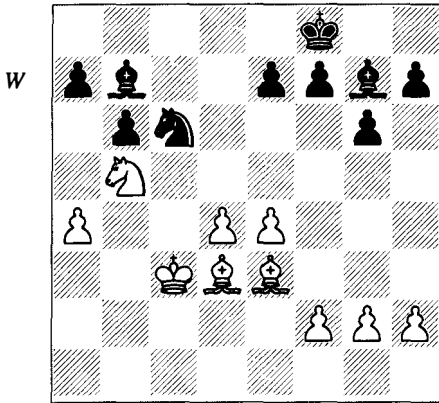
Natural and best was 17 ♖d1, but Black equalizes by 17...♖c7, in view of 18 ♖d6?! ♖f5 19 ♖c6? ♖b7 20 ♖b1 ♖b6 and Black is better (Yusupov).

17...♖a5 18 ♖d1!? ♖ad8 19 ♖c2 ♖xe5! 20 ♖xe5 ♖c3! 21 ♖e2 ♖xe5

Black's little back-rank trick has netted him a pawn and winning position.

While we're in Yusupov Land, let's look at a more recent example (D):

This position might be more appropriately placed in a chapter dealing with the centre, but



Yusupov – Khalifman
Ubeda 1997

it emphasizes one of the most common patterns in modern chess. White begins with a central advantage and better-placed king. This may not seem like much, but here it proves sufficient. First, notice that the e4/d4 complex gains strength in this phase of the game, since the two pawns are now easily defended (whereas in the middlegame, they require constant supervision). Another important point concerns White's a-pawn. Theoretically, it is the only weakness on the board for either side, but as Mayer says, "modern grandmasters have demonstrated repeatedly that 'a weakness is not a weakness' if it can't be exploited." As the game goes, White gains space and creates a central passed pawn (another factor which is generally important in the ending, but often overrated in the middlegame). At some point, White's consequently greater freedom of action forces the exchange of Black's bishop for his knight. Then we get to see a top-flight example of how the bishop-versus-knight endgame wins so often for the bishop, and why the side with the knight generally can't afford to wait for simplification.

The other modern aspect to this position is that it is really just a standard one. Both sides know from vast experience (especially with the Grünfeld Defence) that such a centre, against precisely this black pawn structure, gives White a serious, if not necessarily winning, advantage. Such knowledge from concrete examples typifies modern grandmaster play. Having said all that, let's see the further course of the game:

27 g4!

An interesting and typical starting point. Although the most obvious play for White consists in probing the queenside and advancing the centre pawns, Yusupov's initial step is to tie down the kingside (incidentally gaining space). He prevents the space-gaining ...h5, and discourages ...f5 as well, since that otherwise might transform the central situation to Black's advantage.

27...♗e8 28 ♖c4 ♜b8 29 ♜d3 a6!?

Maybe Black could get away with 29...♜c6, although the weakening of b6 and a6 which now occurs probably couldn't be avoided forever.

30 ♜c7+! ♜d8 31 ♜d5 ♜d7 32 ♜b4

This hits both a6 and f7, and has a little trick in mind:

32...a5 33 ♖d5! ♖xd5 34 ♜xd5 e6!?

Perhaps 34...♖f8 was better. After White's next, he not only has the target on b6 and an outpost on b5, but Black's weakness on d6 is very hard to cover.

35 ♜c3 ♜c7 36 ♜b5+ ♜c6 37 ♜c4 ♖f8 38 ♖f4

Now the problem is d5+ and then ♖d6 or ♜d6+.

38...♖b4 39 f3 ♖f8 40 d5+

Also 40 ♖d6!? was promising, in view of 40...♖xd6? 41 d5+.

40...exd5+ 41 exd5+ ♜b7 42 ♜d6+ ♖xd6 43 ♖xd6

Now we have bishop-versus-knight with pawns on both sides of the board. That is bad enough for Black, but here g5 threatens to tie down the knight permanently, so Black's next is forced.

43...g5 44 ♖g3

Now White's winning plan is ♜b5, d6 and ♖f2-d4. The essence of White's strategy is complete, but it won't hurt to see how he wins with this distribution of forces:

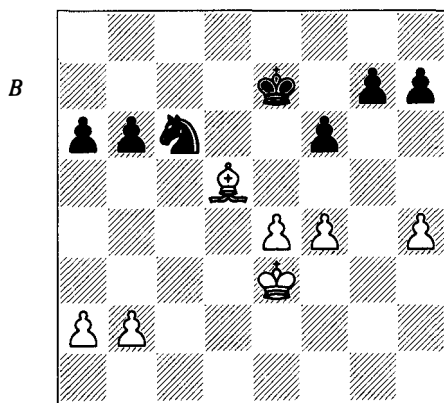
44...♜f6 45 ♖e5 ♜d7 46 ♖d4 ♜c7 47 ♜b5 f6

47...♜d6 48 ♖xb6 ♜xb6 49 ♜xb6 ♜xd5 50 ♜xa5 ♜c5 51 ♖a6 ♜c6 52 a5 f6 53 ♜a7 ♜c7 54 a6 h6 55 h3! – Yusupov.

48 ♖f2 ♜d6 49 ♖xb6 ♜e5 50 ♖xa5 ♜xf3 51 ♖c3 1-0

The next example, without any black weaknesses, seems more favourable to the knight,

but nevertheless demonstrates why Black has to avoid such endings if he possibly can:



Salov – Waitzkin
New York 1996

The following is worth playing over, if only to convince the reader that Black need do nothing obviously wrong to lose:

36...♖d6 37 ♘g8 h6 38 h5 ♜c5 39 ♙f7 a5 40 a3 ♜e7 41 ♜d3 a4

Not an ideal pawn placement.

42 e5! fxe5 43 fxe5 b5 44 ♜e4 ♜c6 45 ♜d4 ♜f5+ 46 ♜d3 ♜c5 47 ♜e4 ♜e7 48 ♙e8 ♜c4 49 ♙f7+ ♜c5 50 ♙e6 ♜c6 51 ♙g4 ♜e7 52 ♙e2 ♜c6 53 ♙f1 ♜c5 54 ♙d3 g6

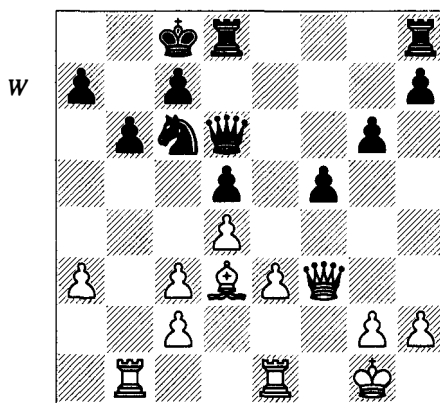
54...♜c6 55 ♜d4.

55 hxg6 ♜xg6 56 ♜f5 ♜e7+ 57 ♜e6 ♜c8 58 ♙e2 b4 59 axb4+ ♜xb4 60 ♜d7 ♜b6+ 61 ♜c6 ♜c8

Here White could have won outright by 62 e6! ♜b3 63 ♜d7 ♜b6+ 64 ♜c7! ♜d5+ 65 ♜d6 ♜f6 66 ♙d1+ ♜xb2 67 ♙xa4 ♜g8 (67...♜c3 68 e7 ♜d4 69 ♙c6 and wins) 68 ♙e8 (Salov).

Now one can see why, in the next chapter (about the bishop-pair versus the knight-pair), I put an emphasis on the side with the knights making direct pawn-breaks and forcing confrontation early on, as opposed to the traditional advice of trying to close the position. If one plays too slowly, endings such as those above tend to arise, in part because it is usually easier for a bishop to exchange itself for one well-posted knight than vice-versa. So the side with the knights is generally better off trying to secure concrete positional advantages before such simplification occurs. I'll close this section

with a brief example of Black trying to follow that philosophy with his lone knight versus a single bishop:



Glek – Djurhuus
Copenhagen 1996

The stereotyped view of things would have it that White wants to open the position for his bishop and Black would like to keep everything closed. But as the play goes, Black resists that temptation (which so often leads to the type of ending we've just looked at) and consistently hammers away at White's pawn structure to enhance his own knight's status:

18 c4 dxc4! 19 ♙xc4 ♜b8

Threatening ...♜xd4!.

20 ♙b5 ♜a5

A knight on the rim! Shades of Chapter 5; here it controls the key c4-square and prepares to dominate the light squares. Hence:

21 c4!

White correctly ignores the a-pawn. He would love to play c5 in conjunction with doubling on the b-file, but Black reacts actively:

21...f4! 22 c5 ♜f8! 23 ♜b4!?

According to Djurhuus, 23 exf4 ♜f6 is unclear. Once White's centre disappears, so do his threats.

23...fxe3 24 ♜xe3 ♜f7 25 ♜eb1 ♜hf8 26 ♜e1?!

Better was 26 ♜f1 ♜d5, when White's d4 weakness balances his temporarily better minor piece.

26...♜f6 27 ♜a4 ♜b7

Now the knight has genuine prospects of activity.

28 c6??

An oversight. Black would have been somewhat better after Djurhuus's 28 ♖b3! ♜d5 29 ♜f3 ♜f5 30 ♜xf5 ♜xf5, with a small advantage due to pressure on d4 and the misplaced rook on a4.

28...♜xd4!

Black is clearly better, based upon the tactic 29 cxb7 ♜xa4 30 ♙xa4 ♜d4+ 31 ♚h1 ♜xa4. Note that his knight will get to the excellent square d6 if White doesn't take on b7.

The moral of this game, active play to justify the knight's existence, will be expanded upon next chapter, in the context of the knight-pair.

7 Bishops versus Knights 2: Minor-Piece Pairs

In this chapter, we continue our discussion of the modern treatment of bishops and knights. Our topic is bishop-pairs and knight-pairs, beginning with the cases in which they are set against one another. At the end of the chapter, I will revisit the bishop-pair in the context of positional pawn sacrifices.

Against all Odds: Championing the Steeds

We have seen in Chapter 4 how big an advantage the bishop-pair confers. Examples of this are legion, and as I indicated there, the theoretical dispute over whether bishops are generally better than knights has been resolved in favour of the prelates. But a statistical superiority says nothing about individual positions. Disregarding the abstract superiority of the bishops, the best modern players are familiar with many types of positions in which knights are acceptable or preferable. This section examines the contexts in which the contemporary master chooses to cede the bishop-pair.

I will divide this topic into three subsections, designated 'a' to 'c', of which the last is the most important (and most modern). Briefly described, 'a' involves the side which acquires the knights simultaneously obtaining an outpost or fixed weaknesses in the enemy camp, and thus being able to stabilize the position to advantage; 'b' features some other countervailing advantage for the knights, normally space or central superiority, and 'c' includes the acceptance of the knight-pair for the sake of superior activity and initiative, which may then be transformed into another type of advantage, such as those described in 'a' and 'b'. Since top players are not inclined to cede major weaknesses, case 'a' is relatively infrequent, but important to understand, as the exemplary positions may be regarded as a sort of long-term goal for the side

with the knights. This is the sort of thing we usually see in instructional and middlegame books. For balance, we will also look at some marginal examples in which the side with the knights isn't able to achieve what he wants. Case 'b' is more common than 'a' in modern play, since both sides have advantages and it is unclear whether the bishop-pair or the space advantage will carry greater weight in succeeding play. Finally, case 'c' is quite typical and of the utmost interest, since the instability of such positions makes an assessment extremely difficult, and thus there tend to be takers for both sides. As this topic is of vital interest to contemporary chess, each part is illustrated with numerous examples.

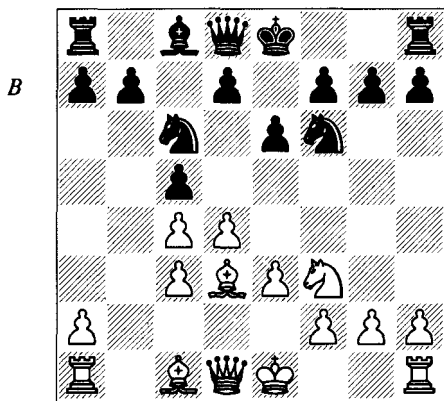
a) Classical Case: Permanent Weaknesses

Traditionally, middlegame books give some example in which the knights have excellent outposts versus an opponent with blocked bishops and/or a crippled pawn structure. This might be considered the 'classical' grounds for accepting the two knights versus two bishops, i.e., that the side with the knights already has, or will acquire in a few moves, permanent advantages such as those described above. In practice, this certainly occurs, although generally, the side with the bishops is not so hopelessly tied down as he is in those textbook examples. The assessment of realistic positions depends upon whether the bishops can nevertheless achieve compensating activity.

We will begin by examining some modern examples of this sort of position, in which the side with the knights is primarily concerned with preventing attacks or freeing moves by his opponent. This situation typically arises when the side with the bishops has been saddled with a pair of doubled pawns, as in the following game:

Glorigić – Hübner*Bugojno 1982*

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 e3 c5 5 ♙d3
 ♘c6 6 ♘f3 ♙xc3+ 7 bxc3 (D)



This is a well-known Nimzo-Indian Defence position. Black's sixth move, ceding the bishop-pair without even waiting for White to lose a tempo by a3, was played by Nimzowitsch himself, but didn't attract attention again for several decades, until Hübner showed that Black could maintain surprising control of this kind of position. White would seem to have ample opportunity to break open lines, say, with f4; but because White is already saddled with the doubled c-pawns which are permanently blockaded, Black is able to adopt the strategy of consolidating that advantage by trying to close or at least stabilize the position.

7...d6 8 e4 e5 9 d5

A committal move. Needless to say, there are alternatives, but I want to get to positions in which White has the sort of permanent weaknesses which are the subject of this section.

9...♗e7 10 ♖b1

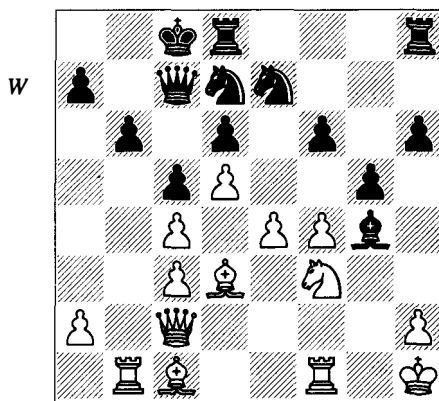
Black's idea is that after 10 0-0, the bad white bishop on d3 and static pawn structure are real liabilities, e.g., 10...♘g6 11 ♗e1 0-0 12 g3 (White feels that he must open lines with f4) 12...♙h3 13 ♘g2 ♗e8 14 ♙e1 f5! 15 exf5 ♙xf5 (now that White's kingside light squares are weakened, it's OK to rid him of his bad bishop; this also takes a defender away from the weakness on c4) 16 f4 ♙xd3 17 ♖xd3 ♖d7 18 ♙b1 ♘f6 19 ♙b2 ♙ae8 20 ♙f1 ♙h3 21 f5 ♘g4 22 ♗e1 e4 23 ♖e2 ♘g6! 24 ♖xe4 ♙f7 25 ♖g2

♖xg2+ 26 ♘xg2 ♘xc4 with a large advantage, Glorigić-Timman, Bled/Portorož 1979.

10...h6 11 ♘g1 ♖c7 12 g3 ♙d7 13 f4 exf4 14 gxf4 0-0-0

So White has achieved f4, but he is way behind in development, and his pawn structure is still too static to afford a break which would free his bishops.

15 ♘f3 ♙g4 16 0-0 ♘d7 17 ♖b3 b6 18 ♖c2 f6 19 ♙h1 g5! (D)



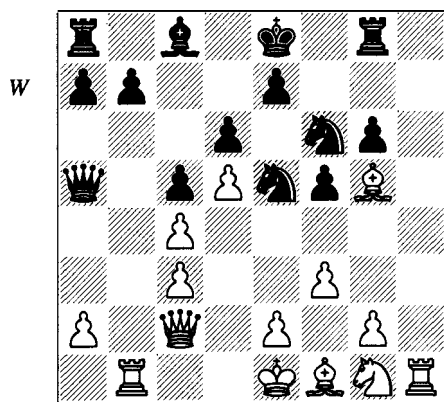
Black's last few moves have aimed at keeping the position closed and restraining any pawn-breaks by White. Now he secures the e5 outpost for his knights.

20 ♘g1 ♙d8 21 ♙e2 h5 22 ♘f3 gxf4 23 ♘h4 ♘g6 24 ♘f5 ♗de5

Positionally, this is superb for Black. Now White simplifies into a lost position:

25 ♙xg4 hxg4 26 ♙xf4 ♘xf4 27 ♙xf4 ♘f3 28 ♙b2 ♙h3 29 ♖g2 ♖h7 30 ♗e3 ♘xh2 31 ♖xh2 g3 32 ♘f1 gxh2 0-1

Of course, this variation is still being disputed, and White can play much better than he did above. Nevertheless, the whole concept of a bishop capture on c3 followed by exploiting a locked position is fairly popular. One such line which is used by several GMs is 1 d4 g6 2 c4 ♙g7 3 ♘c3 c5 4 d5 ♙xc3+!? 5 bxc3 f5 (to restrain e4), a typical example going 6 h4 (6 f3 ♖a5 7 ♙d2 ♘f6 8 ♖c2 d6 9 e4 fxe4 10 fxe4 ♘bd7 11 ♘f3 ♘g4 12 ♙e2 ♗de5 with approximate equality, Piket-Dzindzichashvili, World Team Ch, Lucerne 1989) 6...♘f6 7 h5 ♙g8 8 hxg6 hxg6 9 f3 ♖a5 10 ♖c2 d6 11 ♙g5 ♘bd7 12 ♙b1 ♗e5 (D).



Again, Black has an interest in keeping the pawn structure stable. His pressure on the c4-square now forces White to give up his bishop-pair. After 13 e3 ♖a6 14 ♙xf6 exf6 15 ♜h7 ♙d7 16 ♜h3 0-0-0, Black had at least equality in McCambridge-Hummel, Reno 1997.

Here's another ...♙xc3 game, in which Black not once but twice exchanges bishop for knight.

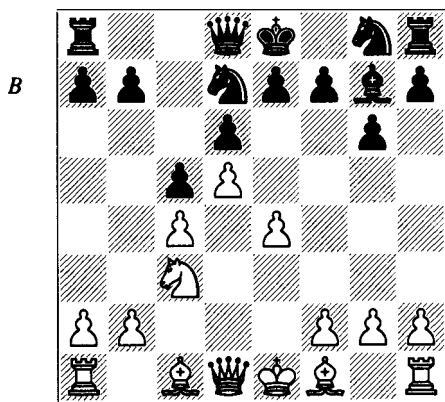
Topalov – Adams

Dortmund 1996

1 ♜f3 d6 2 d4 ♙g4 3 c4 ♜d7 4 e4 ♙xf3!? 5 ♜xf3 g6 6 ♜c3 ♙g7 7 ♜d1 c5

So the first exchange has been to probe the unsupported d4-square. But since that square can't be occupied, White feels safe.

8 d5 (D)



8...♙xc3+!

This is the real point. Black has taken an extra move compared with the Nimzo-Indian (...g6, ...♙g7 and ...♙xc3), but his pawns are

already in excellent positions to prevent any white activity.

9 bxc3 ♜gf6 10 f3 ♜a5 11 ♜b3 0-0-0 12 ♙e2 ♜dg8!

Black, on the other hand, does have a plan: ...g5, to win the e5-square and launch a kingside attack.

13 ♜b1 ♜c7 14 ♙e3 ♙b8 15 ♜c2 g5 16 0-0 ♜g6 17 ♜b2 ♙a8 18 ♜fb1 ♜b8

This is assessed as slightly better for Black by Adams. In a few moves, his attack led to a much larger advantage:

19 ♙h1 h5 20 ♜d2? g4 21 ♜c2 gxf3 22 gxf3 ♜e5 23 f4 ♜c8! 24 ♙f1? ♜xc4! 25 ♙xc4 ♜h3 26 ♜f1

26 ♜e2 ♜xe4.

26...♜xe3 27 ♜d3 ♜xe4+

Black is winning.

In the above examples, the side with the bishops lacked any sort of play. Things aren't always so clear, of course. We now turn to a modern version of our 'classical' case, in which there are weaknesses, but their exploitation is ambiguous.

Petrosian – W. Schmidt

Skopje Olympiad 1972

1 c4 ♜f6 2 ♜c3 d5 3 cxd5 ♜xd5 4 g3 g6 5 ♙g2 ♜b6 6 d3 ♙g7 7 ♙e3 ♜c6 8 ♙xc6+!?

This was considered quite radical when Petrosian first played it. White gives up his powerful g2-bishop and leaves himself with weak light squares, all for the sake of doubling and isolating the black pawns. Flesch reports that Tal, upon seeing this move, said 'For such a black position, I'd happily sacrifice a pawn!'. But Petrosian has a very concrete idea:

8...bxc6 9 ♜c1!

Pressuring the pawns down the c-file, and intending ♙h6. Without the g7-bishop, Black's activity would be greatly reduced, so his next move is logical. But after he plays it, he can't castle.

9...h6 10 ♜f3 ♙h3 11 ♜g1! ♙g4

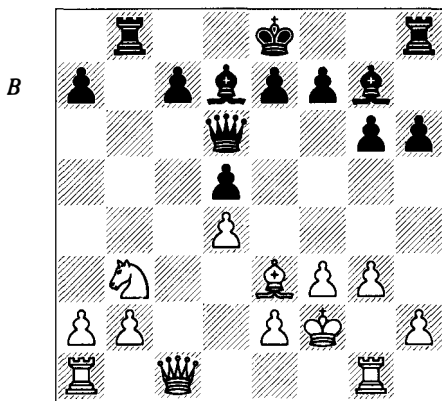
White was threatening g4; but 11...h5 12 ♜g5 or 11...f5 12 ♜a4! is positionally undesirable.

12 ♜d2 ♜d5

At first, this seems to solve Black's problems. The powerful, centralized knight must be

exchanged, and then his pawns are undoubled. But the resulting c-file weaknesses are just as serious.

13 ♖xd5 cxd5 14 ♖b3 ♜d6 15 f3 ♙d7 16 d4 ♜b8 17 ♙f2! (D)



White is now perfectly safe, and ready to exploit the queenside. Since waiting is hopeless in the long run, Black tries to open things up, but this fails tactically:

17...h5 18 ♙f4 e5 19 dxe5 ♙xe5 20 ♜e3! f6 21 ♜xa7

Complications ensue, but objectively, White should and does win.

21...0-0 22 ♜acl ♜fe8 23 ♙xe5 ♜xe5 24 ♜ge1 ♜a8 25 ♜xc7 ♜e3+ 26 ♙g2 ♜a7 27 ♜d6 h4 28 gxh4 ♙e6 29 ♜c3 ♜h6 30 a3 ♜d7 31 ♜g3 d4 32 ♜d3 ♙xb3 33 ♜xb3 ♜d2 34 ♙f1 ♙h7 35 ♙b8 ♜e5 36 ♙g4 f5 37 ♜g5 ♜e3 38 ♜f6 1-0

Karpov – Browne

San Antonio 1972

1 c4 c5 2 b3 ♖f6 3 ♙b2 g6 4 ♙xf6!

Such moves looked strange at the time, but are common now. This is an easier decision to make than Petrosian's in the last game, because White immediately gains a permanent outpost (d5) as compensation for the bishops.

4...exf6 5 ♖c3 ♙g7 6 g3 ♖c6 7 ♙g2 f5 8 e3 0-0 9 ♖ge2 a6 10 ♜c1 b5 11 d3

Ivkov assesses this as only slightly better for White, but Black's task is thankless, as there is no way to blast open lines.

11...♙b7 12 0-0 d6 13 ♜d2 ♜a5 14 ♜fd1 ♜ab8 15 ♖d5 ♜xd2 16 ♜xd2 b4 17 d4!

Now that everything is in place, White trades in his static advantages for dynamic ones. First, he threatens to use the d-file...

17...♜fd8 18 ♜cd1 cxd4 19 exd4 ♙f8 20 c5!

...and now he gains a valuable passed pawn. For the sake of the knights-versus-bishops theme, we can stop here; White went on to win.

Salov – P. Nikolić

Wijk aan Zee 1997

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♖f3 ♙b4+ 4 ♖bd2 b6 5 a3 ♙xd2+ 6 ♜xd2 ♙b7 7 g3 ♙xf3!?

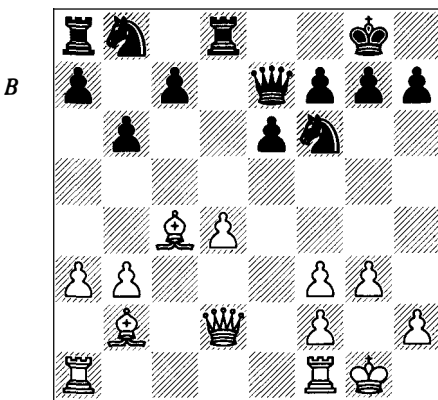
Even Black can make such moves. This time, he doesn't gain the d4 outpost, but is able to transform the pawn structure favourably. An interesting analogue to the last game, also with this ...♙xf3 exchange, occurs in the line 1 c4 b6 2 ♖f3 ♙b7 3 g3 ♙xf3!? 4 exf3 c5. After 5 d4 (otherwise ...♖c6, ...g6 follows, as in Karpov-Browne), Black has the interesting choice between 5...♖c6!?, trying to keep control over d4 (6 d5 ♖d4 7 ♙e3 ♖f5 is about equal), or 5...cxd4 6 ♜xd4 ♖c6 and 7...e6 with active play to follow, an example of the open-lines approach I will discuss in subsection 'c' below.

8 exf3 d5

Threatening to isolate the d-pawn.

9 b3 0-0 10 ♙e2 ♜e7 11 0-0 ♜d8 12 ♙b2 dxc4 13 ♙xc4 (D)

Instead, 13 bxc4 c5 followed by ...cxd4 isolates the c-pawn on an open file.



So Black has managed to create a weakness on d4. Furthermore, it seems to be easily blockaded by 13...♖d5, when White's bishops are rather miserable. Nevertheless, paradoxically,

Nikolić now liquidates the d4-pawn, counting upon the permanent weakness of the doubled f-pawn. I rather doubt that this is the right decision, but it is a very safe one, and was probably motivated by the fear of white activity after ♖fe1 with the idea of f4-f5 and ♖ac1 with play down the c-file.

13...c5!? 14 ♖e3 cxd4 15 ♙xd4 ♜c6 16 ♙b2 ♜d5 17 ♖e4 ♜a5 18 ♖ac1 ♜xc4 19 ♖xc4 ♖ac8

Black has at least equality. In all of these cases, White is hurt by his inability to advance his pawns and free his bishops, often as a consequence of immobile doubled pawns.

Note that the doubled pawns in the above cases had to do with the centre, and some were even targets along an open file. If I were to give a cautionary warning about ceding the bishop-pair for doubled pawns, it would be that doing so to obtain doubled rook's pawns is often not worth it. Here's an example:

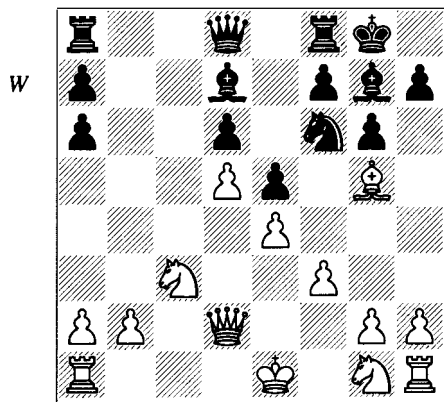
Yermolinsky – Dolmatov

PCA Qualifier, Groning 1993

1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♜c3 ♙g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♙e2 0-0 6 ♙g5 ♜a6 7 ♖d2 e5 8 d5 c6

Notice that Black attacks the *front* of the pawn-chain (see Chapter 3). Another example of the same 'bishop for doubled rook's pawns' phenomenon arises after 8...♖e8 9 ♙f3 ♜h5! 10 ♙xh5 gxh5, when Black has moves like ...f5 and ...♖g6 in store, with full compensation for the doubled pawns. There are similar ...♜h5 moves allowing ♙xh5 in the Benoni Defence and other KID variations.

9 f3 cxd5 10 cxd5 ♙d7 11 ♙xa6!? bxa6 (D)



Black's pawns are crippled, to be sure, but he has the open b-file in return, and the two bishops will be hard to restrain after an ...f5 break. The basic conflict is weaknesses versus activity, as the rest of the game illustrates.

12 ♜ge2 ♖b6 13 ♙e3 ♖b7 14 0-0 ♜e8?!

Dolmatov later preferred 14...♜h5 15 g4 ♜f6 with unclear prospects.

15 ♖ac1?!

Here he suggested 15 b3!? f5 16 exf5 gxf5 17 ♙h6 ♙xh6 18 ♖xh6 ♖f6 with equality.

15...f5 16 exf5! gxf5 17 f4

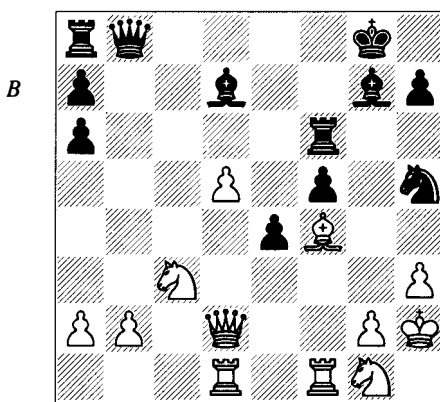
White seeks to stabilize the centre.

17...♜f6 18 h3 ♜h5 19 fxe5?

A strange move; now Black's pawns are mobile.

19...dxe5 20 ♙h2 ♖f6 21 ♜g1? ♖b8! 22 ♖cd1 e4+ 23 ♙f4 (D)

Not 23 d6? ♖xd6 24 ♖xd6 ♙e5+, winning for Black.



23...♜xf4 24 ♖xf4

Giving up the exchange, in view of 24 ♖xf4 ♖xf4+ 25 ♖xf4 ♖b6 26 ♖f2 ♖ab8.

24...♖e5 25 ♜ge2 ♙h6 26 g3 ♙xf4

Black went on to win.

An interesting game. In fact, Black feels rather free about allowing ♙xa6 in a number of Indian Defences, and White seldom takes him up on it. Allowing ♙xh6, capturing a knight on the other side of the board, is a different issue, but a somewhat analogous example arises in the French Defence after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 ♜c6 5 ♜f3 ♖b6 6 ♙e2 ♜h6 7 ♙xh6 gxh6 8 ♖d2 ♙g7 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♜a3 ♙d7 11 ♜c2 cxd4 12 cxd4 a5 with the idea of ...f6, when Black tries to use the f- and g-files and pressure on d4

to counteract his kingside weaknesses (12...♖ac8 intending ...♗e7 and ...♗b5 has also been played). This line seems quite acceptable at the time of this writing. But naturally, exposing one's king in this way is rare.

A very ambiguous version of conceding the bishops arises when the side giving up the bishops inflicts doubled pawns which are not subject to attack, nor even fixed. Here's a radical, ultra-modern example.

Larsen – Betancort

Lanzarote 1976

1 c4 c5 2 g3 g6 3 ♖g2 ♖g7 4 ♖c3 ♖c6 5 b3 ♗f6 6 ♗b2 0-0 7 d3 e6 8 ♗xc6!?

A truly remarkable notion. This time there is no chance of winning the black c-pawns, but Larsen (a disciple of Nimzowitsch) hopes to establish a sort of general restraint.

8...bxc6

After 8...dxc6, White has various ideas; in my English Opening book, I gave 9 ♖f3 ♗e8 10 ♗d2 b6 11 ♗e3 f6 12 0-0-0 e5 13 ♖dg1!?, with the idea g4-g5, h4-h5.

9 ♗d2 d6

This may not be as accurate as 9...e5, when Black should have equal chances. Despite the immobility of his central pawn-mass, it covers central squares and White has no outposts.

10 f4!

To hold down ...e5. Black achieves it anyway, but only at the cost of isolating his doubled c-pawns:

10...♗e7 11 ♖f3 e5 12 fxe5 dxe5 13 ♗g5! ♖e8 14 0-0-0 h6 15 ♗e3 ♖g4 16 ♗g1 h5 17 ♖b1

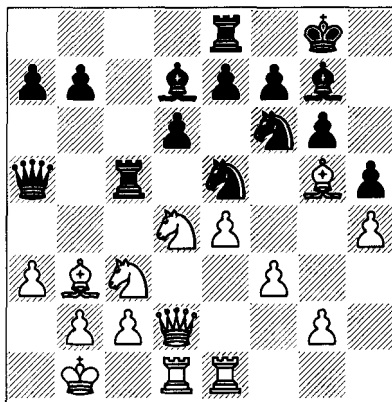
Now the idea is to meet 17...♗h6 with 18 ♗c1. Black doesn't want to wait around for moves like ♖e4 or ♖a4 and ♗a3, so he sacrifices a pawn for activity:

17...e4 18 ♖xe4 ♗xb2 19 ♖xb2 f5 20 ♖c3 ♖e3 21 ♖c1 ♗f6 22 ♗e1 a5 23 ♖a3!

The key defensive move, intending ♖a4. White had a clear advantage and went on to win.

At the top levels, rarely does one side allow an exchange of bishop for knight which shatters his pawns and leaves him with only losing chances. But here's an example of just that:

B



Anand – Kasparov

*PCA World Ch match (game 17),
New York 1995*

The champion, overrating the bishop-pair, played:

16...b5?

This allowed:

17 ♗xf6! exf6

17...♗xf6 18 ♖d5.

18 ♖de2!

This was probably what he missed; 18 ♖d5 ♗xd2 19 ♖xd2 ♖c4 20 ♗xc4 bxc4 intending ...f5 was unclear, according to Anand.

18...♗c6 19 ♖d5 ♗xd2 20 ♖xd2

Black has given up d5 and ruined his own pawn structure with very little counterplay for the bishops. Just to illustrate how difficult it is to defeat the bishop-pair, White failed to find the most accurate way to maintain these advantages and Kasparov escaped with a draw.

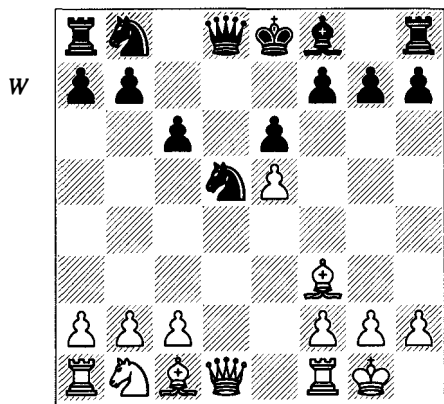
20...♖c4 21 ♗xc4 bxc4 22 ♖ed1 f5 23 exf5 ♗xf5 24 ♖d4 ♗xd4 25 ♖xd4 ♖e2 26 ♖4d2 ♖xd2 27 ♖xd2 ♖f8 28 ♖c1?

28 ♖b4! was correct, as Anand demonstrated in lengthy analysis.

28...♗e6 29 ♖d4 ♗xd5! 30 ♖xd5 ♖e7

Although White is still better, it was not enough for Anand to win the game.

Occasionally, there arise positions in which one static weakness justifies the ceding of the bishop-pair. In Alekhine's Defence, for example, the line 1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♖d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♖f3 ♗g4 5 ♗e2 c6 6 0-0 ♗xf3 7 ♗xf3 dxe5 8 dxe5 e6 (D) somewhat strands White's e-pawn in a semi-closed position.



Whether this fully compensates for the two bishops is not completely clear, but the necessity of defending e5 can tie down White's bishops. If White tries to remain active, Black's pressure is usually justified, e.g.:

Meštrović – Knežević

Yugoslavia 1981

9 ♖e2 ♘d7 10 c4 ♘e7 11 b3?!

Apparently bad. 11 ♘d2 intending ♘c3 may well be best here, but then the bishop is rather passively placed.

11 ... ♗g6 12 ♘b2 ♗c7 13 ♘h5

It's too late to defend the e-pawn by 13 ♗e1 because of 13... ♘b4. White tries for active play based upon f4-f5.

13... ♗dxе5 14 f4 ♘d7 15 f5 0-0-0!

Uh-oh. Now 16 fхg6 hхg6 wins the piece back, so White is reduced to recovering his pawn in a miserably underdeveloped position.

16 fxe6 fxe6 17 ♗xe6 ♘d6 18 ♘g7?!

Probably 18 ♗h3 ♗f4 19 ♗h4 should be tried, but Black is clearly better.

18... ♗hg8 19 ♘h6 ♘xh2+ 20 ♗h1 ♘e5 21 ♗d2 ♘xa1 22 ♗xa1 ♗f4 23 ♘xf4 ♗xf4

Black converted his material advantage into victory rather easily.

Of course, there are other types of static weaknesses which justify taking on the knights against a bishop-pair, the simplest case being when the knights blockade an isolated central pawn (this is usually about equal). The key (and slightly unusual) condition for such a static treatment is that the bishops are not able to free themselves, even in the long run.

b) Space/Centre for Bishops: An Obscure Trade-off

In this situation, the side with the knights achieves no solid outposts, nor does his opponent have weak pawns. However, there are a number of positions in modern chess in which a player may take on the knights for other reasons, most notably an advantage in space and/or central control. If one's goal is to tie down a bishop-pair, it turns out that in practice, one will normally *not* attempt to lock up the whole pawn structure (which turns out to be impossible in practice and also allows the bishop-owner a certain grace period in which to organize his pawn-breaks). Rather, a good way is to control so much space that pawn-breaks which might otherwise favour the bishops are suppressed. With enough space, additionally, one's own pawn advances tend to force the creation of favourable outposts, since they can be supported by pieces with more scope and mobility. In some cases, the attempt to avoid such weakness grants the side with the knights a strong attack. This technique of using pawn advances to force concessions is the same used in case 'c' below. Finally, there are some rock-solid central structures which in and of themselves restrict the bishops and therefore ensure equality.

Nevertheless, the situations described above can always betray the side with the knights if the bishops get loose. This may happen, for example, after a dynamic pawn sacrifice to free the bishops, or simply by transition into an end-game, when the bishops are often a winning advantage and other factors become irrelevant. Let's look at some examples of space advantage first:

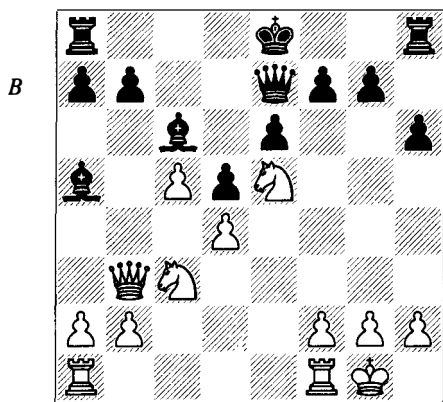
Ivanchuk – Dreev

Linares 1997

1 c4 c6 2 e4 d5 3 exd5 ♗f6 4 ♗c3 cxd5 5 d4 e6 6 ♗f3 ♘b4 7 ♘g5 h6 8 ♘xf6 ♗xf6 9 ♗b3 ♗e7?!

This is slow. Dreev suggests giving back the bishop-pair by 9... ♘xc3+ 10 ♗xc3 dxc4 11 ♘xc4 ♗c6 12 0-0 ♘d7, with an equal position.

10 c5! ♘a5 11 ♘b5+ ♘d7 12 ♗e5 ♗c6 13 ♘xc6 ♘xc6 14 0-0 (D)



A typical position in which White's space restricts the bishops. Without any permanent outposts, White's knights are still the better pieces.

14...♙c7

After 14...0-0, Dreev gives the simple sequence 15 ♖xc6!? bxc6 16 ♗a4 ♙xc3 ♗c7 18 ♚fb1 ♚fb8 19 ♚b3 with a clear advantage.

15 f4 0-0 16 ♚ae1?!

Allowing Black to gain some activity. Dreev prefers 16 ♗c2! ♙xe5 17 fxe5 b6 18 b4, maintaining the bind.

16...♙xe5

This is typical; Black must give back a bishop to relieve the pressure. Unfortunately, it is his good bishop. White maintains a small advantage; the game continued...

17 fxe5 b6 18 cxb6 ♚ab8 19 ♗d1 ♚xb6 20 b3 f5 21 exf6 ♚xf6 22 ♚xf6 ♗xf6 23 ♗d2

...and White was still slightly better, with the superior minor piece and pressure down the e-file versus the backward pawn.

Smejkal – A. Sokolov

Novi Sad 1984

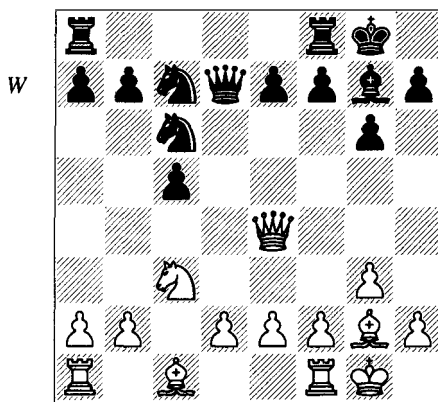
1 c4 ♖f6 2 ♖c3 c5 3 g3 d5 4 cxd5 ♖xd5 5 ♙g2 ♖c7 6 ♖f3 ♖c6 7 ♗a4 ♙d7 8 ♗e4 g6!

Giving up the bishops in return for a central bind and quick development.

9 ♖e5 ♙g7 10 ♖xd7 ♗xd7 11 0-0 0-0 (D)

The 7 ♗a4 variation was very popular until it was discovered how useless the bishop-pair was versus Black's space and better centre. In practice, White's difficulty in developing has actually led to a slight advantage for Black.

12 a3 ♚ac8 13 ♚b1



Black is clearly better after 13 b4 cxb4 14 axb4 ♖b5!; but now Black gets a knight to d4.

13...♖e6 14 b4 b6 15 ♖d5 ♖ed4! 16 bxc5 bxc5 17 e3 ♖e2+ 18 ♙h1 e6 19 ♗d3 exd5 20 ♗xe2 ♚b8 21 ♚xb8 ♚xb8 22 d3 ♚b3

Black is slightly better, the game being eventually drawn.

Shirov – Dreev

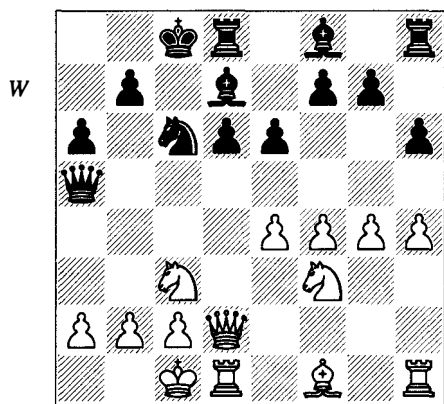
Interzonal tournament, Biel 1993

1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖f6 5 ♖c3 d6 6 ♙g5 e6 7 ♗d2 a6 8 0-0-0 ♙d7 9 f4 h6 10 ♙xf6

Why would White want to give up his bishops here, without any outposts for his knights? And yet, such exchanges are quite frequent for White in the modern Sicilian. Essentially, White hopes that his lead in development and space will tie Black down, so that the bishops will never be a factor. This game is a good example of that strategy.

10...♗xf6 11 ♖f3 ♗d8 12 g4 ♗a5 13 h4 0-0-0 (D)

Of course, White knew that Black would castle queenside in the face of the space grab on the kingside. But the fourth-rank pawns still serve a purpose. One could look at this position prophylactically: what are Black's freeing moves or plans? Now that he's castled queenside, the attack by ...b5 is risky, and the standard freeing moves ...d5 and ...e5 are not possible. Sometimes Black plays for ...g5, in order to win the e5-square, but clearly that is not realistic here. Probably the position is only equal (at least, Shirov himself assesses it that way), but in the next few moves, White



continues to improve his position while Black dawdles.

14 ♖g2 g6?! 15 ♜e3 ♜b8 16 ♜d2 ♜c7 17 ♜hd1 ♞a5 18 ♖f1 ♜c8 19 g5!

The theme of White's strategy is space. Now he calmly advances on the kingside and further restricts the bishops.

19...hxc5 20 hxc5 ♖e8 21 f5! ♖e7 22 ♞d4 ♜h5 23 f6 ♖f8?!

Shirov prefers 23...♖d8, but White is better in any case.

24 ♖e2 ♞c4 25 ♖xc4 ♜xc4 26 ♞b3 ♜c7 27 ♜b1 ♖c6 28 a4!

Grabbing more space. Now Shirov claims a clear advantage for White.

29...♜a8 29 ♜d4 ♜b6 30 a5 ♜a7 31 ♜g3 ♜b8 32 ♜g2! ♜a7

But here, instead of 33 ♞a4? ♖xa4 34 ♜xa4 ♜e3! with counterplay, Shirov gives simply 33 ♜1d3 intending ♞a4 with a clear advantage. The rest of the game is not relevant to our discussion, White winning after many complications. Note that in the game up to this point, the bishops haven't played a significant role.

Here's a different type of Sicilian, but once again pitting the bishops against space and the centre. This time, these factors balance quite nicely, and neither side ever has a notable advantage:

Rublevsky – Svidler

Russian Team Ch, Azov 1996

1 e4 c5 2 ♞f3 ♞c6 3 ♖b5 g6 4 ♖xc6 bxc6 5 0-0 ♖g7 6 ♜e1 ♞h6 7 c3 0-0 8 d4 cxd4 9 cxd4 f6 10 ♞c3 d6 11 b3 ♖d7 12 ♖b2 ♞f7

This is already a pretty well-defined case of space versus bishops, and remains so almost until the end of the game.

13 ♜c2 ♜c8 14 h3

Avoiding the activation of Black's pieces after 14 ♜ad1? ♖g4! 15 ♜d3 f5.

14...♜c7 15 ♜ad1 ♜fe8 16 ♜d2 ♜a5 17 d5

Freeing White's remaining bishop and setting up a semi-closed centre for the knights.

17...cxd5 18 exd5 ♖h6 19 ♜d4 ♞e5 20 ♞h2!? ♜b6 21 ♜h4 ♖g7 22 ♞e4 ♜c2 23 ♖d4 ♜a5 24 a4 ♖f5 25 ♖xe5 fxe5 26 ♞g4 ♖xe4

It's typical that bishops can more easily exchange enemy knights than vice versa; this neutralizes a lot of potential attacks.

27 ♖xe4 ♜d2 28 ♜xd2 ♜xd2 29 ♞e3 ♜f8 30 f3 ♜f4! 31 ♜xe7 ♖xe4 32 ♜e6+ ♜f8 33 ♜xd6+ ♜g8 34 ♜e6+ ♜f8 35 ♜c8+ ♜f7 36 ♜e6+ 1/2-1/2

Increasingly common are lines in which one side gives up the bishops in order to set up a solid central situation. Ideally, a freeing move follows which either creates weaknesses or activates the knights enough to equalize. Statistically, the bishops will probably retain some advantage in most of these types of positions, but there are specific variations in which the knights can hold their own. This rather uninspired strategy is used by Black in a few openings, notably the Slav and Caro-Kann, both of which can lead to the sort of pawn structure seen in the next game.

Belavsky – Z. Almasi

Ubeda 1997

1 d4 ♞f6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 d5 4 ♞f3 ♖e7 5 ♖g2 0-0 6 0-0 dxc4 7 ♜c2 a6 8 a4 ♖d7 9 ♜xc4 ♖c6 10 ♖g5 ♖d5 11 ♜d3 ♖e4 12 ♜e3 ♞bd7 13 ♞c3 ♖c6 14 ♜d3 ♖b4 15 ♜fe1 ♖xf3!?

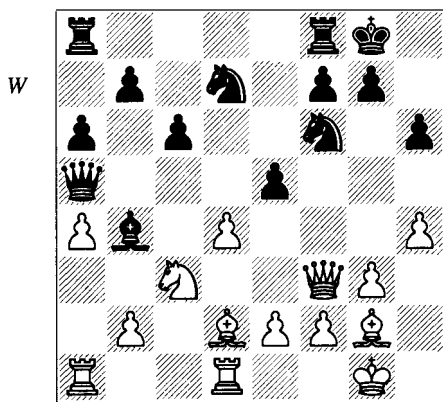
A new move in a standard position. Black trusts his knights in this structure.

16 ♜xf3 c6 17 ♜ed1

Belavsky gives 17 e4 ♜a5 18 e5 ♞d5 19 ♖d2 ♜fd8 as unclear. Perhaps this was a better winning try. Almasi assesses the position after Black's next as equal.

17...♜a5 18 h4 h6 19 ♖d2 e5 (D)

This freeing move generally equalizes, at least in analogous Slav positions.



20 ♖e1 ♜f8 21 e3

Here 21 e4 exd4 22 ♜xd4 ♜c5 activates Black's knight.

21... ♜ad8 22 ♜f5 exd4 23 ♜xa5 ♙xa5 24 ♜xd4 ♜c5 25 ♜ad1 ♜xd4 26 ♜xd4 ♜d8!? 27 b4 ♜xd4 28 exd4 ♜d3

Black is equal, and eventually drew.

A classic e4/d4 or ...e5/...d5 centre versus the bishops arises out of certain standard openings, two examples being 1 d4 ♜f6 2 ♙g5 e6 3 e4 h6 4 ♙xf6 ♜xf6, which is unbalanced but with chances for both sides, and 1 ♜f3 d5 2 g3 ♙g4 3 ♙g2 ♜d7 4 0-0 c6 5 h3 ♙xf3 6 ♙xf3 e5, when Black's space gives him compensation for the bishops. There are also cases in which the knights support a semi-closed structure with a space advantage on one wing. This comes up in several Queen's Gambit lines, as in the following example:

Van Wely – Gelfand

Tilburg 1996

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♜c3 ♜f6 4 ♜f3 e6 5 ♙g5 h6 6 ♙xf6 ♜xf6 7 e3 ♜d7 8 a3 g6 9 b4 ♙g7 10 cxd5 cxd5!?

More active is 10...exd5, but this subjects Black to a minority attack by b5.

11 ♙d3 0-0 12 0-0 ♜e7

Now a standard situation has arisen, with White's queenside space the main factor against the bishops. But Black has no trouble getting his pieces out, and thus no real worries.

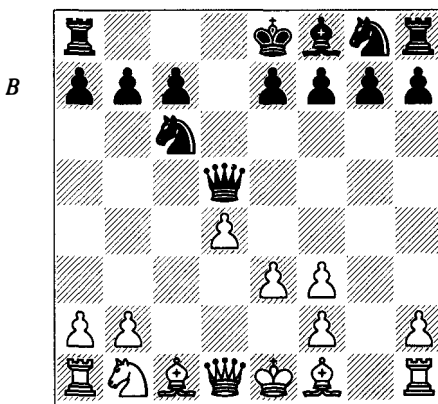
13 ♜b3 ♜b6 14 a4 ♙d7 15 ♜d2!? ♜c8 16 ♜fc1 ♜d6 17 b5 ♜fc8 18 a5 ♜d8

Black has equalized.

The examples in 'a' and 'b' have been characterized by a lack of direct confrontation. Typically, the side with the knights restricts the bishops' possibilities, but there is little forcing action to create weaknesses or outposts. In the next section, we see a much more radical strategy.

c) Reversing the Conventional Wisdom

The most typical and frequently-arising two-knights strategy is completely ignored by middlegame books. It is when the side with the knights is able to exploit a temporary advantage (normally a lead in development, which arises for reasons described below) in order to blast open the position and dynamically achieve concessions from the side with the two bishops. This leads to a sort of modern quasi-principle which I first talked about in my 1981 book *Queen's Gambit: Chigorin Defence*. At the time, I was considering the following position, arising after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 ♜c6 3 ♜f3 ♙g4 4 cxd5 ♙xf3 5 gxf3 ♜xd5 6 e3 (D):



Black faces a choice between 6...e6 and 6...e5. Soltis had called 6...e5 'illogical' since, he said, "Black should seek a closed position where the white bishops will be restricted." Let me quote at length from my own words there (with the promise not to do so again!):

"In my opinion, 6...e5 is quite logical and indeed *theoretically* preferable to 6...e6, i.e. better by reason of general principle ... Given that a game is in the opening or early middlegame stage (i.e. that not too many pieces and pawns have been traded), it tends to be desirable for he

who has acquired the two bishops to immediately close the position, and for he who gains the knights to immediately open it.

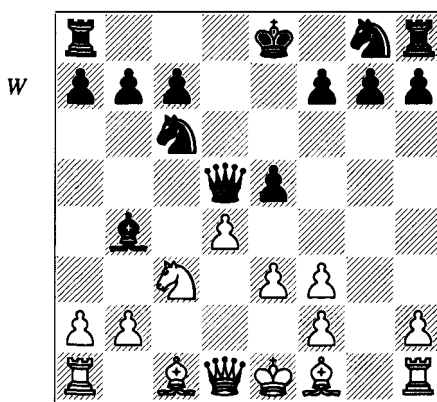
"This may seem paradoxical, since textbooks are forever emphasizing that bishops like open positions and knights like closed ones ... But a careful look at modern chess reveals that, in practice, the acquisition of the bishop-pair is usually followed by a slowing down of the play, while he who takes on the knights will strive to open things up and 'mix it'. This is for a good reason. Acquisition of the two bishops in the early part of the game often comes at the cost of tempi and/or balance in one's position. If the two-bishop owner can lock things up a bit, he can reorganize and carefully engineer an opening of the position which will emphasize the bishops' natural superiority. This is precisely what the possessor of the knights wishes to avoid. Time favours the bishops, but early in the game, they are often passively placed, needing some tempi to find their best posts. Knights, on the other hand, have a certain native flexibility and tactical 'reach' which allows them to create threats and force concessions before the bishops are ready. For this, open lines are needed to allow the cooperation of the other pieces. Often by, e.g., breaking in the centre, the knights' owner will be able to force enemy pawns to advance, creating permanent outposts for the knights, at which point they are no longer inferior pieces to the bishops, even in the long run."

This holds up well today, although I'd probably phrase it a little differently now. For example, I'd replace 'close the position' with 'stabilize the position', since the real goal for the side with the bishops is to avoid dynamic pawn-breaks by his opponent. Chess opening theory is replete with examples of such pawn-breaks for the sake of gaining outposts and/or activity for the knights, so much so that they swamp the number of counter-examples in which the owner of the knights scurries to close the position. As seen above in case 'a', the latter situation *does* arise, but only under certain restricted circumstances. I would now modify my 'principle' above to cover case 'a' by adding that in general, if upon the acquisition of the knight-pair its owner already has a permanent outpost (as in the Karpov-Browne example in 'a'), or if the side with the bishops is already

crippled with a permanent and exploitable weakness (as in the Hübner Variation of the Nimzo-Indian, also described in 'a'), then an attempt to keep the position closed *may* be advisable. But otherwise, central pawn-breaks and other line-opening moves tend to be correct. Let me show what all this means by example.

Returning to the last diagram, the Chigorin Defence was the original battleground for the dispute between Chigorin and leading players of his day with regard to the relative merits of bishops and knights. Today, it is still instructive. After years of experience, the line-opening move 6...e5 is well established. Play usually continues:

6...e5 7 ♖c3 ♙b4 (D)



Now two variations will illustrate Black's knight-pair strategy:

1) 8 a3

2) 8 ♙d2

1)

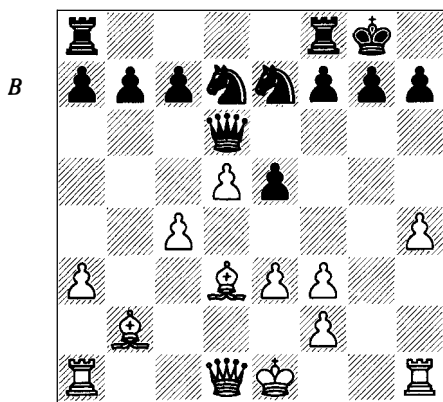
8 a3 ♙xc3+ 9 bxc3 ♘ge7 10 c4 ♗d6 11 d5 ♘b8 12 ♙b2 ♘d7

A perfect illustration of Black using his lead in development to compel the creation of weaknesses. First, he lures the white pawns forward and establishes himself on the c5 outpost.

13 h4 0-0 14 ♙d3 (D)

14...c6!

Opening lines! Again, one might think that, with c5 firmly under control, Black would play solidly and keep things closed, as in section 'a' above. But time favours the bishops, and before White completes his development, Black forces him to make further weaknesses.



15 dxc6

This isolates the white c-pawn and gives up his space advantage, but 15 e4 would leave a gaping hole on f4 after ...d6g6.

15...Wxc6 16 e4 Wxe6! 17 g1

Pawn-grabbing by 17 xxb7? is favourable for Black after 17...ab8 18 d5 dxd5 19 cxd5 Wa6!.

17...f6 18 Wc2 h8! 19 c1 dxc5 20 h5 h6 21 a4 Wac8

This is Moskalenko-Morozevich, Moscow 1994. Black is clearly better for all the classical reasons: White's weak a-, c-, f- and h-pawns, and his homeless king.

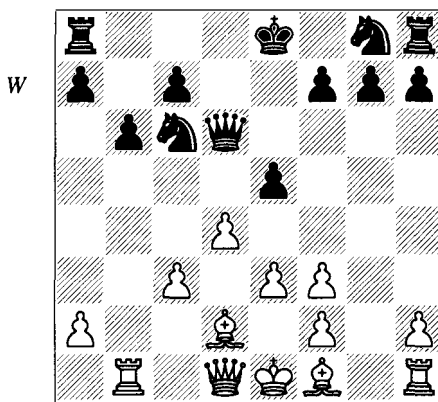
2)

8 d2 xc3 9 bxc3 Wd6

The idea 9...exd4 10 cxd4 dge7 is also quite playable. A good example of how Black should play actively before White can consolidate is 11 g1! 0-0-0! 12 xg7 (12 f4 has the idea g2, but allows 12...dxd4! 13 exd4 Wxd4 14 e2 he8 with a terrific attack, Savchenko-Furhoff, Berlin 1991) 12...he8! 13 xh7 (13 Wb3 dxd4 14 Wxd5 Wxd5 is equal; 13 c3 Wh5!? 14 f4 Wh2 15 Wxf7 d5 16 Wg4+ b8 with threats on e3 and c3) 13...dxd4 14 exd4 df5+ 15 e3 dxd4 with many threats, e.g., 16 e2 Wf5 17 dxd4 Wh7 18 Wd2 Wh2 19 0-0-0 c5 20 Wc2 Wxe2 with a clear edge. This is a quintessentially modern example of how two-knights positions can be handled. In the past, such lines were always played solidly and slowly by Black, leading to the conclusion that White was better.

10 b1 b6 (D)

11 f4!



Kasparov's typically active interpretation of the position: White temporarily gives up a pawn to activate his centre and bishop-pair. The question is whether Black has enough of a lead in development to counter this, and how he should do so.

11...exf4 12 e4 dge7 13 Wf3 0-0 14 xxf4 We6!

Although Smyslov's choice of 14...Wa3 15 e2 f5 16 0-0 fxe4 17 Wxe4 Wxc3 led to messy complications and a draw in Kasparov-Smyslov, Candidates match (game 11), Vilnius 1984, 14...We6 is certainly more thematic, not only threatening the a-pawn, but also preparing to challenge the light squares.

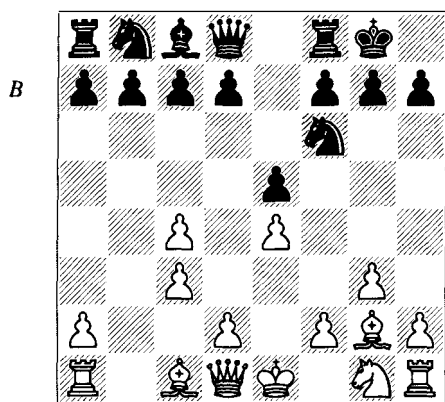
15 b5

15 e2 is now answered by 15...f5! and then if 16 e5?, 16...xa2 is perfectly safe as White's pawns have been immobilized. 15 d5?! fails to 15...dxd5 16 c4 Wad8, e.g., 17 d1 Wfe8.

We are following the 1986 correspondence game Bang-Boey. Here Boey played 15...a6 16 d3, and now 16...f5! was easiest and fully equal, as the reader can verify. Boey grabbed the a-pawn instead, which was risky and unclear. The other consistent move is the immediate 15...f5!? 16 e5 (16 d5 fxe4 17 dxe6 exf3 18 xc7 Wf6 turns out to be drawish) 16...a6 17 a4 da5 with moves like ...Wd5 and ...b5 to come, establishing a bind on the light squares – this is enough for equality.

These games are not terribly important theoretically, but the technique shown here by the side with the knights – prying open lines and forcing weaknesses while the opponent is still lagging in development – can be seen throughout modern chess.

Let's move on to a more standard opening, in which Black rushes to concede the bishop-pair for only the slightest crippling of his opponent's pawn structure. In the English Opening after 1 c4 e5 2 d3 f6 3 g3, 3...b4 (as opposed to 3...d5 or 3...c6) has been called the 'Modern Variation'. It was little-used until Smyslov and others revealed its potential in the 1960s. After 4 g2 0-0, White has the clamping move (*à la* Botvinnik) 5 e4!?, when 5...xc3 6 bxc3 (D) would at first appear to be promising for White, supporting his bishop-pair with a broad central pawn-mass.



For example, 6...d6 7 d3 b7 8 h3 c5 9 e2 d7 10 e3 e4 11 d2 e8 12 0-0 f7 13 f4 a6 14 f5 f6 15 g4, and White simply rolled up the kingside in Tukmakov-Vasiukov, USSR Ch, Moscow 1969.

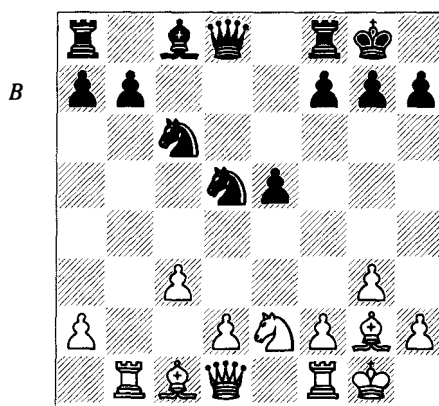
Here Black wrongly allowed White to stabilize the position. The right solution was to open things up, exploiting his temporary lead in development, even at the cost of liquidating White's doubled pawns. Let's see how this works:

6...c6! 7 e2 d5! 8 cxd5 cxd5 9 exd5 d5 10 0-0 c6 11 b1 (D)

Now Black has a central advantage, with particularly good prospects of using the light squares. If White tries 11 d4 instead, 11...exd4 12 cxd4 g4! creates further weaknesses (after f3, the e3-square on an open file and the isolated d4-pawn guarantee Black the better game). So White tries to activate his rook.

11...b6

In the game Budnikov-Naumkin, Lloyds Bank Masters, London 1993, Black put similar



pressure on the light squares: 11...b8!? 12 a3 e8 13 b5?! (13 c4 b6 14 d3 f5 15 b3 was suggested, but then Black has won the d4 outpost, enhancing his knight-pair) 13...e6 14 b1 d7 15 e1 a6 16 b2 b5 17 d3 f5 (or 17...g4!?) and Black was better. Note how his central pressure and open lines are soon converted into outposts for his knights and good squares for his bishop: 18 d1 h3! 19 h1 g4 20 d2 bd8!? (20...b6!) 21 c5! f5 22 f3 h3 23 d1 h5 24 f2? g6! 25 a4 f5 26 axb5 axb5 27 d4 a5! 28 xb5 c4 29 a2 d3!, and Black's pieces dominated the board.

12 d4

This invites the enemy pieces to settle on d5 and c4, but 12 c2 e6 13 d3 d7 simply leaves the d-pawn weak on an open file.

12...e6 13 a4 c4! 14 e1 d7 15 a3 fd8 16 c5 d5

Black is better, Pribyl-Hecht, Luhačovice 1972.

In each example and note, Black converted his development and pressure into control of a colour-complex. The rigidity of White's pawn structure was caused by Black's early opening of the position.

It was White's turn to play with these same ideas in the following game:

Fischer – Spassky

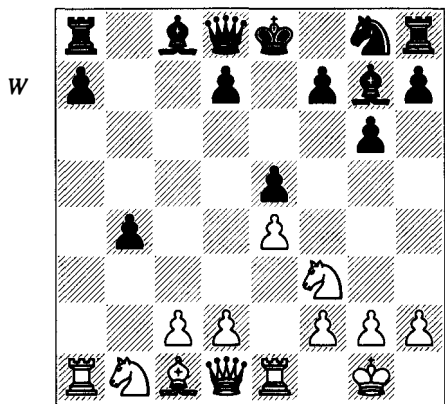
Match (game 11), Sveti Stefan/Belgrade 1992

1 e4 c5 2 f3 c6 3 b5 g6 4 xc6 bxc6 5 0-0 g7 6 e1 e5 7 b4!?

The next few moves are a classic example of the side with the knights trying to open the

position, and the side with the bishops trying to keep it as closed as possible.

7...cxb4 8 a3 c5!? 9 axb4 cxb4 (D)



10 d4! exd4 11 ♖b2 d6 12 ♜xd4 ♜d7 13 ♜d2 ♖b7 14 ♜c4 ♜h6 15 ♜f5!? ♖xb2 16 ♜cxd6+ ♜f8 17 ♜xh6 f6?

17...♖xa1 18 ♜xa1 ♜xd6 is better.

18 ♜df7! ♜xd1 19 ♜axd1 ♜e7 20 ♜xh8 ♜xh8 21 ♜f5+! gxf5 22 exf5+ ♖e5 23 f4

...and White was winning the ending.

Without even knowing the theory, one can well imagine that a slow white build-up (with, say, d3, ♜bd2, b3, and ♖b2) would never have created the activity and prospects for the knights that Fischer's violent line-opening did.

Here's another top-class English Opening with ...♖b4 and ...♖xc3:

Kasparov – Karpov

World Ch match (game 16), Seville 1987

1 c4 e5 2 ♜c3 ♜f6 3 ♜f3 ♜c6 4 g3 ♖b4 5 ♖g2 0-0 6 0-0 ♜e8 7 d3 ♖xc3

Another voluntary exchange, to try to damage White's pawn structure.

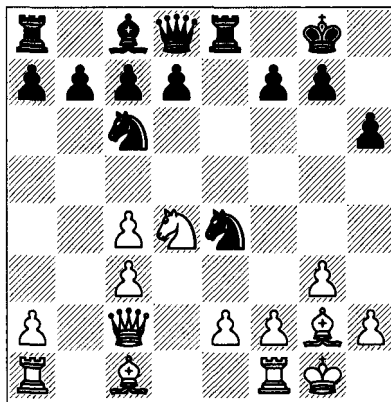
8 bxc3 e4 9 ♜d4 h6

To prevent ♖g5. Now Black would like to play 10...♜xd4 11 cxd4 d5, so White plays an odd-looking move:

10 dxe4! ♜xe4 11 ♜c2 (D)

An interesting position. At first glance, one might think that Black's play consists of blocking the position (particularly c5) with his knights, closing the position, and then targeting the c-pawns. But that would give White the

B



time he needs to activate his bishops and hurl his e- and f-pawns forward. The correct solution opens the position and voluntarily liquidates White's doubled pawns for him:

11...d5!

This greatly increases the knights' effectiveness. Now, for example, ...♜a5 is a real threat to win the light squares, so White has to react quickly.

12 cxd5

White's bishops would be passive after 12 ♜d1 ♜xd4 13 ♜xd4 ♜f6 14 e3 ♖f5!, and 12 ♖e3 ♜xd4 13 cxd4 (13 ♖xd4 ♖f5) allows simply 13...c6, with the positional threat of ...♜d6 (White's bishops are again passive). Finally, Karpov gives 12 ♜b5 ♖f5 13 cxd5 ♜xg3 14 e4 ♜xf1 15 exf5 (15 dxc6 ♖xe4 16 ♖xe4 ♜h4) 15...♜e1 16 ♖xf1 ♜xd5, intending 17 ♜xc7 ♜c4.

12...♜xd5 13 e3

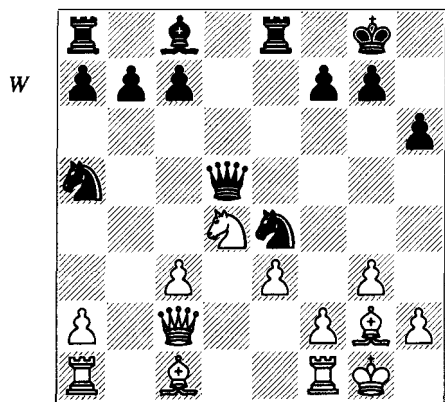
Now White's c1-bishop looks miserable, and typically, the tactical lines favour the more active side, e.g., 13 ♜d1 ♖f5 14 ♜xf5 (14 f3 ♜f2) 14...♜xf5, intending 15 f3? ♜xg3!.

13...♜a5!? (D)

Opening the play has won squares for the knights (in this case c4); but this move also releases pressure on White's position. The active line 13...♜xd4! (ridding White of another weakness!) would have controlled key squares in a safer way. Karpov gives 14 cxd4 c6, keeping the dark-squared bishop ineffective, e.g., 15 ♖b2 ♖f5 16 f3?! ♜xg3 17 e4 ♜xe4 18 fxe4 ♖xe4, in which case Black's attack would be way too strong.

The real point of moves 11 and 13 in this line is that the establishment of good squares for

one's knights and limiting the enemy bishops often takes precedence over trying to maintain weaknesses in the opponent's position.

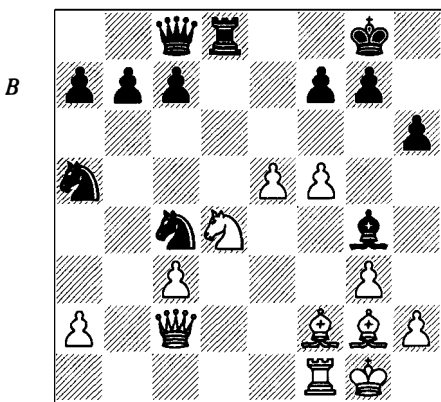


14 f3 d6 15 e4 c5 16 e3 ddc4 17 f2 e7 18 ad1 d7 19 f4

White has achieved good pawn mobility (compare the note to move 13). Prospects are about equal.

19...ad8 20 e5 g4 21 f5!? e6 22 xd8 xd8 23 d4 c8! 24 f5?! (D)

Natural, but based on a misassessment of the two-bishops position which follows. Karpov gives the interesting line 24 e1 c5 25 f3 xf3 26 xf3 d2 27 e4 xa2!? 28 f5 c6 29 g4, which looks very promising for White, but here 28...d2 29 g4 xf3+ 30 xf3 c6 might be OK, in view of 31 xc6 xc6 32 e6 f8! 33 xc5+ e8.



24...c5! 25 e4 cxd4 26 xg4 dxe5!?

Later, 26...dxc3! 27 e6 de5 intending ...f6 was suggested. Black is at least equal now, so

the remainder of the game is given without notes:

27 e2 ec6 28 cxd4 dxd4 29 dxd4?! xd4 30 f6 e6 31 b2 e3+ 32 h1 b6 33 fxg7 c4 34 c2 xg7 35 d5 d6 36 b2 e5 37 b3 a5 38 f2 f5 39 b2 b5 40 a3 g6 41 f2 0-1

Mayer calls the opening of the position for the knight-pair 'increasing the speed of the knights'. He points to the following well-known classic as an example:

Anderssen – Paulsen

Vienna 1873

1 e4 e5 2 f3 d6 3 d4 exd4 4 xd4 c6 5 b5 d7 6 xc6 xc6 7 g5 f6 8 c3 e7 9 0-0-0 0-0 10 he1 e8 11 b1 d7 12 xf6! xf6

White gives up first one bishop and then the other, in order to gain a lead in development. He now correctly transforms this by playing actively to open the position and forcing permanent weaknesses in Black's position. The rest of the game looks about as modern as can be.

13 e5! e7 14 d5 f8 15 exd6 cxd6 16 xe8! xe8 17 d2! c6 18 e4f5 19 ec3

Domination of the outpost.

19...d7 20 a3 f7 21 h3 a6 22 g4 e8 23 f4 e6 24 g5!

The big squeeze.

24...b5 25 h4 e8 26 d3 b8 27 h5 a5 28 b4! axb4 29 axb4 xh5 30 xf5 f7 31 d3 d7 32 e4 f5 33 h1 e8 34 ef6+! gxf6 35 xf6+ f7 36 xh7+ g7 37 xg7+! xg7 38 xe8+ f8 39 xf5+ xf5 40 xd6

White won shortly.

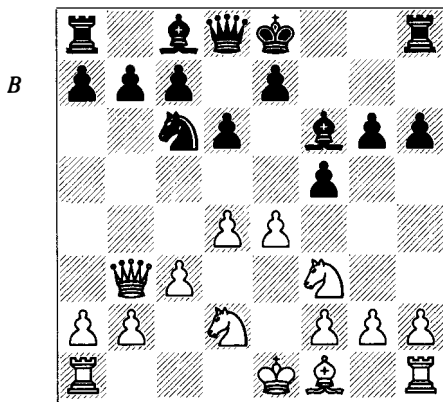
Here's the same idea in a more modern context, employed by one of the great masters with the knights.

Petrosian – P.M. Nielsen

Nimzowitsch Memorial, Copenhagen 1960

1 d4 f5 2 g5 g6 3 d2 g7 4 c3 f6 5 e3 d6 6 gf3 c6 7 b3 h6? 8 xf6 xf6 9 e4! (D)

Opening the position to create weaknesses, and thus posts for his knights. White can afford the luxury of e3 and then e4, both because he is



ahead in development and because Black can't castle. It's important to note here that if White just made slow developing moves and allowed Black to consolidate, the second player might even be better, due to his bishop-pair.

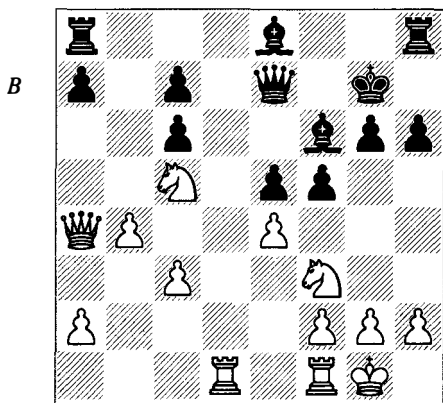
9...e5?

As usual, the side with the bishops (which has typically fallen behind in development to acquire them) needs to stabilize the position as much as possible, consolidate, and only later begin to think about re-opening things to his advantage. Thus 9...e6! was necessary, followed by ...0-0, when White is only somewhat better.

10 ♖b5! ♜f8 11 ♙xc6 bxc6 12 dxe5 dxe5 13 ♜a4 ♜d6 14 ♘b3!

A typical pay-off for a lead in development combined with aggressive pawn play: White has gained an outpost on c5 for his knight, and his central pressure continues.

14...♙d7 15 ♜d1 ♜e7 16 ♘c5 ♙e8 17 b4 ♜g7 18 0-0 (D)



The bishops have no prospects. The rest is almost automatic:

18...♜f8 19 ♜a6 fxe4 20 ♘d2 e3 21 ♘de4! exf2+ 22 ♜xf2 ♙g5 23 ♜xf8 ♜xf8 24 ♘xg5 hxg5 25 ♜b7 1-0

Let's return to a double e-pawn example. Note how in the following game, Adams isn't content to have space as compensation for the bishops, but aggressively attacks with his pawns to translate that space into enhanced scope for his knights.

Adams - Conquest

Hastings 1996/7

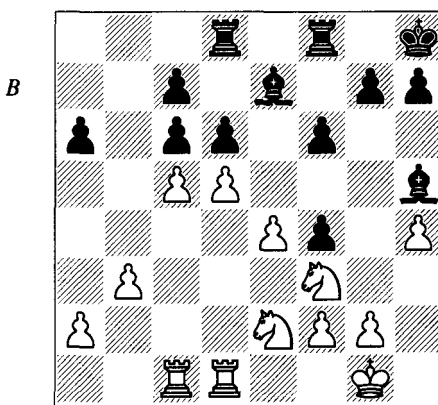
1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙b5 a6 4 ♙a4 d6 5 ♙xc6+ bxc6 6 d4 f6 7 c4 ♘e7 8 ♘c3 ♘g6 9 ♙e3 ♙e7 10 0-0 0-0 11 h3 ♜h8 12 ♜c1 ♙d7 13 ♜e2 ♜c8 14 c5!

This forestalls ...exd4 and ...c5, as well as restricting Black's bishops.

14...♜b7 15 ♜fd1 ♜ad8 16 b3 ♙e8 17 h4! ♘f4

White's idea is shown by 17...h6 18 h5 ♘f4 19 ♙xf4 exf4 20 ♘h4 with a magnificent knight.

18 ♙xf4 exf4 19 ♘a4 ♙h5 20 d5! ♜b5?! 21 ♘c3! ♜xe2 22 ♘xe2 (D)



Now both knights are potentially aimed at e6.

22...f5!

22...cxd5? 23 ♘xf4.

23 ♘xf4 fxe4 24 ♘h5 exf3 25 cxd6 ♜xd6 26 dxc6 ♜h6?

White is better, but this loses.

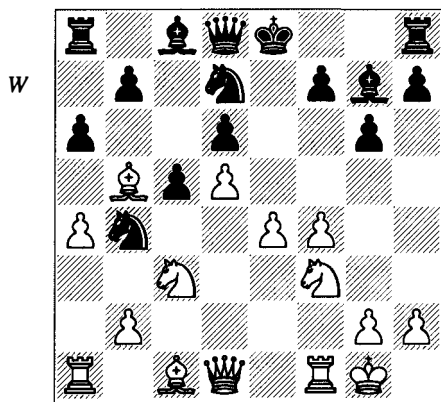
27 ♖g3 fxg2 28 h5! ♜g8 29 ♞d7 ♠a3 30 ♞c2 ♞f7 31 ♜xg2 ♠f8 32 ♞d8 ♞ff6 33 ♞c4 ♞xc6 34 ♜f5 1-0

In view of 34...♞he6 35 ♞xc6 ♞xc6 36 ♜e7+.

How about the World Champion? It's hardly surprising that practically every time Kasparov acquires the knight-pair, he immediately follows with a series of line-opening blows.

Kasparov – Nunn
Lucerne Olympiad 1982

1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♜c3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4 ♠g7 8 ♠b5+ ♜fd7 9 a4 ♜a6 10 ♜f3 ♜b4 11 0-0 a6 (D)



12 ♠xd7+! ♠xd7 13 f5!

A remarkable idea for the bishop-loving Kasparov. Note that once White exchanges his light-squared bishop, he cracks open lines and at the same time puts his pawns on the light squares. It's also very important that Black has no knight capable of making it to the key blockade square e5, which would arguably squelch the attack.

13...0-0 14 ♠g5 f6

White can answer 14...♠f6 with 15 ♜d2!, after which Black has to worry about his kingside weaknesses as well.

15 ♠f4 gxf5

An instructive option is 15...g5 16 ♠xd6! ♠xa4 17 ♞xa4 ♜xd6 18 e5! (a central pawn-break to create unassailable posts for the knights) 18...fxe5 19 ♜xg5 b5 20 ♞xb4! cxb4 21 ♜ce4 and White's attack was too strong in

Gheorghiu-Kertesz, Kowanija 1984. The ideas of ♜h5, ♜e6, and f6, as well as d6 and ♜d5+, were too much to handle.

16 ♠xd6 ♠xa4 17 ♞xa4 ♜xd6 18 ♜h4!

The culmination of a marvellous combination. This had to be foreseen (18 exf5?? ♞ad8). Now the f5-square practically wins the game by itself. Using line-opening and sacrificial devices to create outposts for knights is part and parcel of modern play.

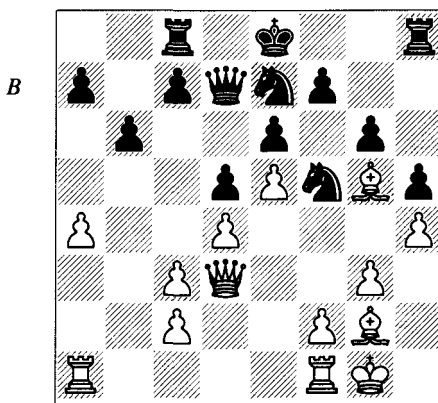
18...fxe4 19 ♜f5 ♜d7 20 ♜xe4 ♜h8

The options are equally hopeless: 20...♞ae8 21 ♜g4 or 20...♜xd5 21 ♜xd5+!.

21 ♜xc5 1-0

Black resigned in view of 21...♜xd5 22 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 23 ♜e6!. An elegant game.

Once one begins to examine modern chess, one sees this idea – the side with the knights opening lines – in just about every opening. Even in optically bad positions, one should usually strive for open lines, as in this simple example:



Yudasin – Av. Bykhovsky
Beersheba 1996

In this game, Black has somehow lost all the kingside dark squares. Given a few moves, White will win by some combination of c4, unleashing the bishops, and a5, activating the rooks; even f3 and g4 is ultimately a threat. Should Black try to hunker down against this, and keep the position as closed as possible, say, by ...c6? That will certainly lose in the long run; instead, the key is to open lines:

18...c5! 19 ♠f6 0-0 20 ♜d2!?

To infiltrate the kingside.

20...♖h7!

Now that ...♗g8 is available for defence, Black is ready to open the c-file.

21 a5 b5 22 a6 cxd4! 23 cxd4 ♖c4 24 ♖fb1!

Already, 24 c3 ♖fc8 with the idea ...b4 seizes the initiative; notice how the knight on f5 has assumed an active role.

24...♟xd4 25 ♖xe7 ♗xe7 26 c3 ♟c6 27 ♖xb5 ♟xe5 28 ♖b7 ♗c5!

Black, with a strong centre and active knight, has achieved approximate equality.

Not surprisingly, the Nimzo-Indian is replete with examples of two knights pitted against two bishops, as that imbalance arises after ...♖xc3. What might nevertheless surprise the reader is in how many of these lines, Black (with the knight-pair) strives to open the position. We have already seen the classical Nimzo-Indian case of a fixed queenside pawn structure in which Black attacks doubled white c-pawns, say, by ...♖a6 and ...♟a5. But far more common are fluid pawn structures in which Black must act quickly, time being on the side of the bishops. Middlegame books generally ignore this more typical case, probably because fluid play is always harder to describe than static play. To get a flavour for how the modern Nimzo-Indian is actually played, let's look at a string of examples from the highly-topical 4 ♗c2 variation.

Kramnik – Anand

Linares 1998

1 d4 e6 2 c4 ♟f6 3 ♟c3 ♖b4 4 ♗c2 0-0 5 a3 ♖xc3+ 6 ♗xc3 b6

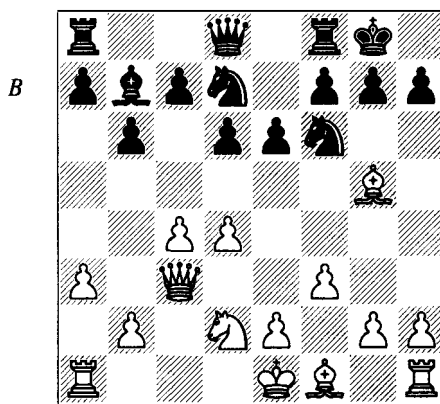
In Chapter 3, I mentioned another radical example of trying to crack open the position for the knights, 6...b5!? 7 cxb5 c6 8 bxc6 ♟xc6, e.g., 9 ♟f3 ♖b7 10 ♖g5 ♖c8 with very active piece play. That this concept is at least plausible is shown by the fact that on move 8, White very often simply declines to take on c6.

7 ♖g5 ♖b7 8 ♟f3

Recently popular again. Another illustration of our theme followed 8 f3 h6 9 ♖h4 d5 10 cxd5?! exd5 11 e3 ♖e8 12 ♖f2 c5! and Black, due to his development and the opening of the e- and c-files, was already slightly better in Seirawan-Karpov, Rotterdam 1989; here 13

dx5? d4! 14 ♗d2 dxe3 15 ♖xe3 ♗e7 is just bad for White.

8...d6 9 ♟d2 ♟bd7 10 f3 (D)



10...d5

Psakhis gives the instructive line 10...c5 11 e4 cxd4!? 12 ♗xd4 ♗c7 13 ♖e2 ♖fe8 14 0-0 d5 15 exd5 exd5 with equality. By opening the position, Black is able to get squares for the knights; if instead, Black delays ...cxd4 or ...d5 too long, White will play d5 himself, consolidate, and then activate the bishops by eventual pawn advances. However, 10...d5 is still more direct.

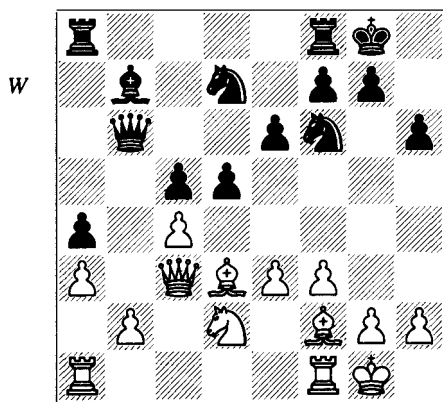
11 e3 c5!

Similar and instructive was 11...♖e8 12 ♖d3 h6 (Timman has also played 12...e5 here, opening lines) 13 ♖h4 c5 14 dxc5?! (14 cxd5 cxd4! 15 ♗xd4 e5; 14 0-0 cxd4 15 exd4 ♖c8 'with easy play' – Timman) 14...♟xc5 15 ♖e2 e5, threatening ...d4, in I.Sokolov-Timman, Rotterdam 1998. This forced the opening of the position by 16 cxd5, but Black developed terrific activity (and wonderful knights) after 16...g5 17 ♖f2 ♟xd5 18 ♗c2 ♖c8 19 b4 ♟e6 20 ♗b2 e4! 21 ♟xe4 f5 22 ♟g3 f4 23 exf4 ♟exf4 24 0-0 ♟c3 with a large advantage.

12 dxc5

This is a concession, giving Black a central advantage; but White has trouble maintaining the centre. A line such as 12 ♖e2 cxd4 13 exd4 (13 ♗xd4 e5) 13...dxc4 and ...♖c8 shows how easily Black can create weaknesses and win squares such as d5. And after 12 cxd5, both 12...♟xd5 13 ♖xd8 ♟xc3 (after some complications) and 12...cxd4 13 ♗xd4 e5 14 ♗a4 ♖xd5 equalize.

12...bxc5 13 ♖d3 ♜b6 14 0-0 h6 15 ♙h4 a5
16 ♙f2 a4 (D)



Clamping down on the queenside. This kind of position has arisen time and again; Black usually has just enough play to make up for the bishops, due to his superior centre and space on the queenside. White's bishops are not bad, but they are hardly very active either.

17 ♖fe1 ♖fe8 18 ♙ab1 ♙a6 19 ♜c2 ♖e5 20 ♙f1 ♜c6 21 ♙g3 ♖ed7 22 ♙f2 ♖e5 23 h3 ♖fd7 24 f4?!

Seirawan criticizes this move, giving 24 cxd5 exd5 25 e4 ♙xf1 26 exd5 ♜xd5 27 ♖xf1; in that case, Black has, among other moves, 27...♜d3!? 28 ♙bc1 ♜xc2 29 ♙xc2 ♖d3 30 ♙d1 ♖e5 with equality.

24...♖xc4 25 ♖xc4 ♙xc4 26 ♙xc4 dxc4 27 ♜xc4 ♙ab8 28 ♙e2 ♙b3 29 ♙d1 ♖b6 30 ♜c1 e5!

Again, not waiting around. Now his activity and the weak white e- and b-pawns ensure Black at least equality.

31 e4 exf4 32 ♜xf4 ♖c4 33 e5 ♜e6 34 ♙xc5 1/2-1/2

Not 34...♖xe5?? 35 ♙de1 ♖d3 36 ♜xa4!, but 34...♖xb2 or 34...♙xb2 is fine for Black.

That example overlaps some with the themes of section 'b'. Here are some more radical examples of 'speeding up the knights' in the 4 ♜c2 Nimzo-Indian:

Miles – de Firmian

Interzonal tournament, Manila 1990

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♖c3 ♙b4 4 ♜c2 c5 5 dxc5 ♖a6 6 a3 ♙xc3+ 7 ♜xc3 ♖xc5 8 f3 d5!?

Years of theory have confirmed that the slow approach by 8...d6 allows White to get developed and gradually utilize his bishops, e.g., 9 e4 e5!? (or the more modern 9...0-0 10 ♙e3 b6 11 ♙d1 ♜e7 12 ♖e2 with a small but definite advantage) 10 ♙e3 ♜c7 11 ♖e2 ♙e6 12 ♜c2! 0-0 13 ♖c3 with advantage, Flohr-Botvinnik, Match (game 6), Moscow/Leningrad 1933.

So de Firmian introduced 8...d5!?, which tries to interfere with White's standard build-up before he gets developed. The goal is to speed up the knights, and the best response is to try to slow them down.

9 cxd5 b6!

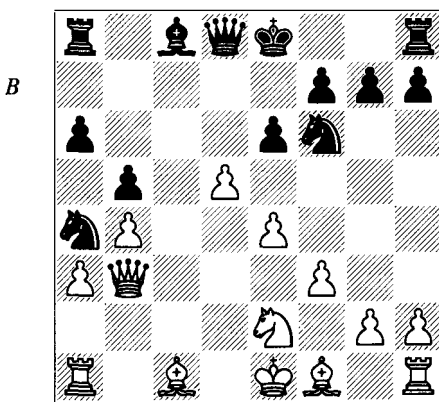
The point. 9...♜xd5 10 e4 is clearly better for White.

10 b4!?

This is hard to resist, but another pawn move may not be best. First, notice that 10 dxe6 ♙xe6 is extremely difficult for White; Black has a huge lead in development and White's queen is a target, while moves like ...♖b3, ...♙c8, and ...♖d5 or ...♖h5 loom. And after 10 e4, de Firmian gives 10...exd5 11 e5 ♖fd7 12 ♖h3 0-0 13 ♙e2 ♙e8, and Black is better.

The best move is probably 10 ♙g5!, to catch up in development and simplify after e3 and ♖e2 with a well-timed ♙xf6. This would 'slow down' the knights and take advantage of the more static pawn structure.

10...♖a4 11 ♜b3 b5 12 e4 a6 13 ♖e2 (D)



To answer 13...exd5 with 14 e5. Note, again, how White wants to close the position for the bishops, whereas Black needs to open it up. The diagrammed position has arisen several times, and is probably about equal.

13...0-0 14 ♖g5 h6 15 ♙h4 exd5 16 e5 ♜e8!!

An amazing piece sacrifice. White was counting on 16...g5 17 ♙f2. In the course of what follows, although the knights work wonders, the specifics are not important for our thesis. So I will just give the moves with minimal notes, for the reader's enjoyment.

17 f4!?

Suffice it to say that much analysis has been devoted to 17 exf6 d4, critical being 18 ♜d3 ♘b2 19 ♜c2 ♘c4 with unclear play.

17...g5! 18 ♙f2 ♘e4 19 ♙d4 ♙e6

The knights certainly look fine now. On the other hand, White has kept the position closed and it is probably equal.

20 ♜f3 ♜c8 21 f5! ♙d7 22 ♘g3?

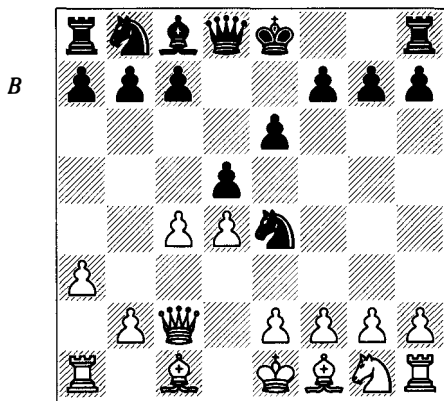
This allows a stunning combination. Mayer analyses the options 22 e6 and 22 h4 at length, when White is fully in the game.

22...♜xe5!!

The idea is 23 ♙xe5 ♜e8 with a devastating attack, so Miles declines the offer, but can never recover:

23 ♙e2 ♜e8 24 ♘h5 ♜xf5 25 ♜e3 ♜c3! 26 ♙xc3 ♘axc3 27 ♙g4 d4 28 ♜xd4 ♘c5+! 29 ♘d2 ♘b3+ 30 ♘xc3 ♘xd4 31 ♙xf5 ♜e3+ 32 ♙d3 ♙f5 33 ♙ad1 ♘e2+ 34 ♘c2 ♜e5 35 ♘d2 ♜b2+ 36 ♘e3 ♙g4 37 ♙d2 ♜d4# (0-1)

Sticking with the 4 ♜c2 Nimzo, the line 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 ♜c2 d5 5 a3 ♙xc3+ 6 ♜xc3 ♘e4 7 ♜c2 (D) provides an exemplary testing ground for modern two-knight play.



First, it's worth pointing out that instead of 6...♘e4, slow moves such as 6...0-0 have always

been considered inadequate, precisely because if White is allowed to develop, he has the bishop-pair at no price. But in the diagrammed position as well, modern theory is focused entirely on lines involving a quick central pawn-break by ...e5 or ...c5. The long investigation of this ancient line has convinced leading players that opening the position by radically changing the pawn structure is Black's only correct course. Here's one of the main lines:

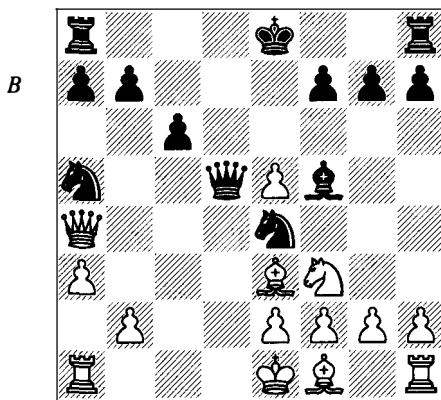
7...♘c6

To illustrate my point, look at Black's two other main lines here. One is 7...c5!? 8 dxc5 ♘c6 9 cxd5 exd5 10 ♘f3 ♙f5 11 b4 0-0 12 ♙b2, another well-investigated variation in which Black relies on opening the position and rapid development. If White gets his pieces out, he wins, but the amazing continuation 12...b6!? 13 b5 bxc5 14 bxc6 ♜a5+ 15 ♘d2 ♜ab8, sacrificing a piece, is still being debated at the time of this writing; thus far, Black is holding his own.

Also very interesting is 7...e5!? (another line-opener!). Then Atalik-Shaked, New York 1998 continued 8 cxd5 ♜xd5 9 e3 exd4 10 ♘f3 ♘d6 11 ♘xd4 ♙d7 12 ♙d2 ♘c6 13 ♘e2!? (13 ♘xc6 ♙xc6 14 f3 0-0-0 is fully equal) 13...♙f5 14 ♜c1 ♘e4 1/2-1/2; Black may even have a slight edge.

8 e3

The older line with 8 ♘f3 e5 9 dxe5 ♙f5 10 ♜b3 provides a good example of how the knights benefit from development and play on a colour complex (here, the light squares). Consider the position after 10...♘a5 11 ♜a4+ c6 12 cxd5 ♜xd5 13 ♙e3 (D).



Black has two good ways to make the knights work:

a) 13...♟c4 14 ♖d1 ♜xb2 15 ♖xd5 ♜xa4 16 ♖a5 ♜ac3 (16...♜ec3 also leads to an advantage, according to Saidy) 17 ♖xa7 (17 ♟xa7 ♜b5 18 ♟b6 ♖xa5 19 ♟xa5 ♜xa3) 17...0-0 with an edge for Black.

b) 13...0-0-0 14 ♖d1 (14 ♟xa7 ♜b3; 14 ♜d4 ♟g6 15 ♖c1 ♜c5 16 ♖b4 ♜cb3!) 14...♖xd1+ 15 ♖xd1 ♖xd1+ 16 ♜xd1 ♖d8+ (16...♜c4!?) 17 ♜e1 ♜c4 18 ♟xa7 ♜xb2 19 ♟d4 ♜c4 and Black is better.

8...e5

Here we go again. Everything else is too slow.

9 cxd5

Beginning a long forced sequence which is necessary for White if he wants to play for an advantage.

9...♖xd5 10 ♟c4 ♖a5+ 11 b4 ♜xb4 12 ♖xe4 ♜c2++ 13 ♜e2 ♖e1+ 14 ♜f3 ♜xa1 15 ♟b2 0-0 16 ♟g3

After a lengthy forced sequence, we arrive at a position which has been tossed back and forth for at least 65 years without resolution! Unlike some other examples we've seen, White has plenty of his own tactical chances here, mainly by direct attack against the king. In the latest game with this line, White won by means of a beautiful attack: 16...♜h8?! 17 dxex5 ♟e6 18 ♜f3 ♖xh1 19 ♜g5 g6 20 ♜xf7+! ♖xf7 21 ♟xe6 ♖g7 22 ♟f7! ♖xf7 23 e6+ ♜g8 24 ♖d4 ♜f8 25 exf7 ♜xf7 26 ♖d7+ 1-0 Atalik-Sax, Szeged 1997. A good reminder that sometimes, the open position *does* favour the bishops; everything depends upon the specifics. Now it's up to Black (who until just recently was on top in this line) to find a better path if he can. This variation may well be one of those where the dynamic balance is never decidedly in favour of one side or the other. Other examples of lines which have been threatened with 'refutation' time and again, and yet continue to flourish, are the Sicilian Najdorf (particularly, the Poisoned Pawn), the Botvinnik Semi-Slav (where theory is out at move 35 in some equal ending!), the Sicilian Dragon (various lines are ultra-critical, but Black keeps surviving), the French Winawer Poisoned Pawn, the Sicilian Sveshnikov Variation, and critical variations of the Exchange Grünfeld. It seems that if an opening survives

10 or 20 years of refutation attempts, that usually indicates that it has the fundamental positional strength to survive indefinitely. For more on the subject of long-term dynamic balance, see Chapter 10.

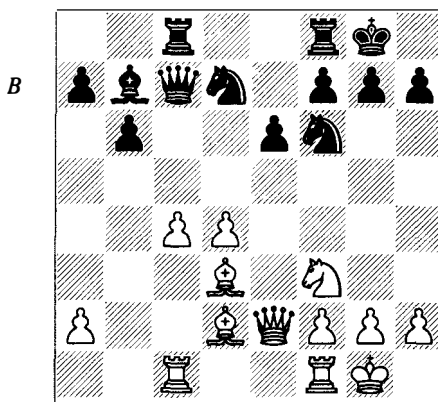
The main point of this lengthy discussion of 4 ♖c2 is that in every line we've considered, slow play by Black has proved insufficient, and the fight against the bishops is therefore best conducted in open, hand-to-hand combat. Nothing could be further from the old stereotype of knights liking closed positions.

This is also evident in the Rubinstein Variation of the Nimzo (4 e3). Here, for example, is a specific manoeuvre with is absolutely standard now, but only became so in modern practice:

Øgaard – Flesch

Oslo 1974

1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♜c3 ♟b4 4 e3 c5 5 ♟d3 0-0 6 ♜f3 d5 7 0-0 cxd4 8 exd4 dxc4 9 ♟xc4 ♟xc3 10 bxc3 ♖c7 11 ♖e2 ♜bd7 12 ♟d2 b6 13 ♟d3 ♟b7 14 c4 ♜ac8 15 ♜ac1 (D)



This is a typical position with hanging pawns, of a type that arises from several variations. Black now takes the opportunity to 'speed up' his knights:

15...♟xf3!? 16 ♖xf3 e5!

The prying-open move. As the next note shows, this kind of combination has to be specifically calculated for each position.

17 ♟e3?!

Flesch claims that this is forced, but in fact, it leaves Black better. True, 17 dxex5 ♜xe5 and 18...♜xd3 obviously favours Black (White's a-

and c-pawns are isolated). But 17 d5! looks much better to me. Flesch gives 17...e4! 18 ♖xe4 ♜e5 as favourable to Black, but 19 ♜f5! seems to compel 19...♜xe4 (19...♜xc4 20 ♖d3 ♜e5 21 ♜fe1) 20 ♖f4! (perhaps what Flesch missed; although White is also at least equal and possibly slightly better after 20 ♜xe4 ♜xc4 21 ♖c3, among others), when Black must try 20...♜f3+ 21 gxf3 ♜d6. Unfortunately, after 22 ♜e5 ♜fd8 23 ♜h1, for example, Black may be able to draw (23...f6 is a good start), but he will tend to be slightly worse in various endings.

It's interesting that other commentators have simply copied Flesch's assessment after 17 d5 e4 18 ♖xe4 ♜e5. I don't think this spoils the thematic importance of the ...♖xf3 and ...e5 idea, however. It simply means that in this exact position, the effect is unclear. Another option for Black after 17 d5 might be 17...♜e8!?, to prepare ...f5 (17...♜c5 18 ♖f5 and 19 ♖g5 is not attractive), e.g., 18 ♖c3 ♜d6 19 ♜fe1 ♜ce8 intending ...f5. For the research-minded reader, by the way, a famous example of almost exactly the same ...♖xf3 and ...e5 theme is Portisch-Karpov, Bugojno 1978.

Returning to our game:

17...exd4 18 ♖xd4 ♜e5 19 ♜f5 ♜xd3 20 ♜xd3

Instead, 20 ♖xf6 allows 20...♜f4! (but not 20...♜xc1? 21 ♜g5) 21 ♜xd3 ♜xf6 with the better structure.

20...♜fd8 21 ♜c3 ♜e4 22 ♜b2 ♜c5! 23 ♜c3

Flesch gives 23 ♖xg7? ♜d3 24 ♜a1 ♜xc1 25 ♜xc1 ♜e8 (or 25...♜f4) 26 ♜c3 ♜e6! and Black wins.

23...♜e6 24 ♖e3 ♜d6 25 ♜c2 ♜d7 26 ♜b4 ♜d3

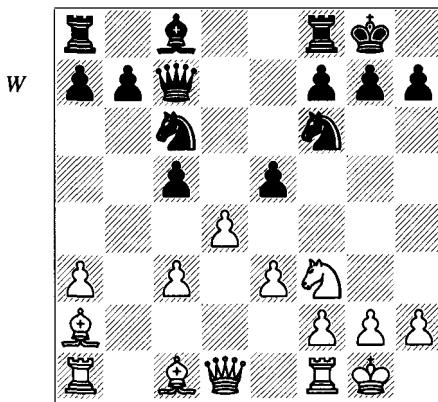
Now it is obvious that the knight is much better than the bishop. Black is also very active, as the nice finish shows:

27 a4 f5! 28 g3 f4 29 gxf4 ♜d4! 30 ♖xd4 ♜g4+ 31 ♜h1 ♜f3+ 32 ♜g1 ♜c6 33 f5 ♜xd4 34 h3 ♜g4+! 0-1

Gelfand – Korchnoi

Horgen 1994

1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♜c3 ♖b4 4 e3 c5 5 ♖d3 d5 6 ♜f3 0-0 7 0-0 ♜c6 8 a3 ♖xc3 9 bxc3 dxc4 10 ♖xc4 ♜c7 11 ♖a2 e5 (D)



One of the oldest main lines of the Nimzo-Indian. In fact, Black plays ...e5 against any reasonable white plan, again opening the position for the knights. The hope is that by using his open lines (...♖g4, ...♜d8), he can force White to make concessions, such as dxe5, giving up central influence and exposing his own c-pawn.

12 h3 b6 13 ♜c2?!

Korchnoi disapproves of this, suggesting 13 d5 e4! instead, with unclear complications.

13...♖a6 14 ♜d1 e4! 15 ♜g5 ♜ae8!

Intending ...h6. Korchnoi avoids 15...♖d3!? 16 ♜xd3! exd3 17 ♜xd3 with unclear compensation for the exchange.

16 f3 ♖d3 17 ♜f2

Now 17 ♜xd3? exd3 18 ♜xd3 is less attractive due to the hole on g3, e.g., 18...♜a5 19 a4 ♜g3 20 ♜e4 ♜xe4 21 fxe4 c4 22 ♜c2 ♜b3 (Korchnoi).

17...h6 18 fxe4

As so often, Black's aggressive play would earn a strong outpost after 18 ♜xe4!? ♖xe4 19 fxe4 ♜xe4.

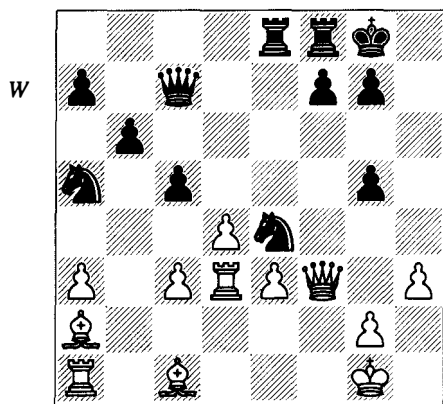
18...hxg5 19 ♜xd3 ♜xe4 20 ♜f3 ♜a5! (D)

Black's space advantage has been converted into a powerful grip on the light squares. White's next move contests this, but runs into more trouble.

21 c4 b5! 22 cxb5 c4 23 ♜d1 ♜b3 24 ♖xb3 cxb3

Korchnoi's pawn sacrifice has emphasized the superiority of his knights over White's bishops. Now Black threatens ...♜c2, and 25 ♖d2 ♜xd2 26 ♜xd2 ♜c3 with ...♜xe3+ next is unsatisfactory, so White gives up the exchange.

25 ♜b1 ♜c3 26 ♜xb3 ♜xd1 27 ♜xd1



Now Korchnoi points out the consolidating move 27...♖c4!, after which Black is better, one of the more interesting lines being 28 ♙d2 ♜b8 29 ♜b4 ♙a2 30 ♜b3 ♜fc8 31 ♙c3 (31 d5 ♜c2 32 ♙d3 ♜xb5) 31...a5! with a clear advantage.

Well, there is a limitless supply of such examples. We have already looked at some of these elsewhere. For example, in the main lines of the French Winawer (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♙xc3+ 6 bxc3), we have seen that Black (with the knight-pair) normally seeks active play via ...f6 and often foregoes ...c4, even though White already has a static weakness in the doubled pawns on c2 and c3. The opposite strategy, closing the position by ...c4 and leaving out ...f6, allows White plenty of time to regroup and use his bishops to win on the kingside.

Along the same lines, I would like to remind the reader of the old-fashioned Exchange Ruy Lopez that we examined in Part 1, Chapter 4. Without revisiting all the issues that accompanied 1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙b5 a6 4 ♙xc6 dxc6, it is interesting to look at that variation in the light of this chapter's concepts. Experience teaches us that, despite the old precepts against opening lines for the bishops, the most effective lines for White involve d4, not d3. In fact, Black will often respond to d4 by trying to keep the position as stable and as closed as possible. He sometimes does this by ...f6 and ...♙g4, for example, even ceding his precious bishop-pair rather than unleashing the dangerous knights by ...exd4. Even when he does play ...exd4, Black's role in most games is to slow the play

down, whereas White will throw his pawns forward to create better posts for his knights (see especially the Fischer-Spassky example in that chapter). As usual, the philosophy with the bishops is that there will always be time to open things up later, e.g., by a general pawn advance on the queenside. One might wish to return to that chapter to see how the ideas of this one apply.

Vengeance of the Bishops

After a chapter of mostly favourable positions for the knight-pair, I want to examine the modern pawn sacrifice for two bishops. Doing this will remind us that in the majority of cases, the bishops are a positive force, so much so that modern players freely give up pawns (and even the exchange – see the next chapter) in order to unleash their power.

The choice of great games in this category is so wide as to reduce an author to tears. Ultimately, I grabbed games pretty much at random out of a long list of candidates. Let's start with Kasparov, who loves such sacrifices.

Kasparov – A. Sokolov Belfort 1988

1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 e6 3 e4 c5 4 e5 ♘g8 5 ♘f3

It is a sign of the increasing sharpness of modern chess that up until 20 years ago, White would almost always try to preserve his pawn here by either 5 f4 or 5 d4 cxd4 6 ♙xd4, even though these lines promise very little against a knowledgeable opponent.

5...♘c6 6 d4

This sacrifice is the modern way to treat the position. At the time this game was played, the way in which Kasparov now proceeds was well-known, but its theoretical status was in Black's favour.

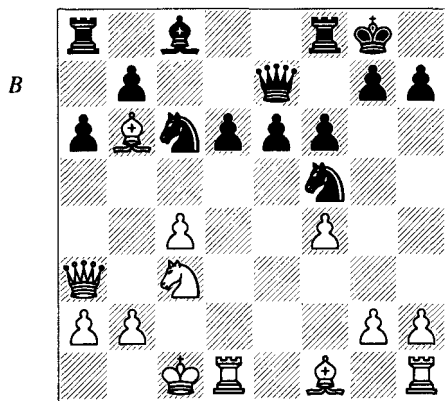
6...cxd4 7 ♘xd4 ♘xe5 8 ♙db5

Now White secures the bishop-pair.

8...a6 9 ♘d6+ ♙xd6 10 ♙xd6 f6 11 ♙e3 ♘e7 12 ♙b6 ♘f5

The moves up to this point are well-known. For some time, White would enter a pawn-down ending by 13 ♙xd8 ♘xd6 14 ♙c7 at this point, but ultimately, this was shown to be equal for Black.

13 ♖c5 d6 14 ♗a5 ♗e7 15 0-0-0 0-0 16 f4
 ♟c6 17 ♗a3 (D)



17...e5

This move is completely logical, securing d4 for the knights (and thus blocking the d1-rook from its attack on d6) while making the c8-bishop 'good'. It does, however, concede the d5-square, which Kasparov rushes to secure.

18 g4! ♟f4 19 ♟d5 ♗f7 20 f5!

Preventing ...♗e6, and setting up an eventual attack by g5. The problem with such positions is that White has concrete ways of increasing his pressure, whereas Black has difficulty finding a plan. Thus his next move, designed to break down the bind.

20...g6! 21 ♖g1!

Rather than grabbing the d-pawn, White keeps the initiative. Now both ♗xd6 and g5 are threats.

21...gxf5 22 g5! ♟h8

Forced. The fragility of Black's position is illustrated by 22...fxg5 23 ♖xg5+ ♟h8 24 ♗xd6 with the idea 25 ♖xd4! exd4 26 ♗xd4+ ♟xd4 27 ♗e5+.

23 gxf6 ♗e6 24 ♗xd6 (D)

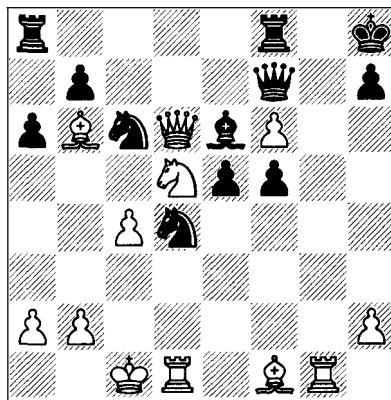
24...♗xd5

Kasparov analyses at length to prove that 24...♖ac8, 24...♖ae8, and 24...♖g8 all lose, an entertaining line going 24...♖ac8 25 ♖g7 ♗h5 26 ♖xd4 ♟xd4 27 ♗xd4 ♗xd5 28 f7!! ♟xg7 (28...exd4 29 ♗f6; 28...♗xc4 29 ♖g8+ ♖xg8 30 ♗xe5+) 29 ♗xe5+ ♟xf7 30 ♗d7+ and ♗g7#.

25 cxd5 ♗xf6 26 ♗xf6+ ♖xf6 27 ♟b1!

The great thing about this game is that, having seen the bishops in the middlegame, we

B



now get to see how devastating they can be in an ending. Now 27...♟e7? allows 28 ♗c7 ♟f3 (28...♟g6 29 ♖xg6) 29 ♖g3 e4 30 d6, so the next few moves are forced.

27...♟d8 28 ♗c5

Still threatening ♖xd4.

28...♖c8 29 ♗e7 ♖f7 30 ♗d6 ♟f3 31 ♖g3 e4 32 ♗e2 ♖f6

Again best, in view of 32...♖g7 33 ♗xf3 ♖xg3 34 ♗xe4!; compare the game.

33 ♗f4 ♖g6 34 ♗xf3 ♖xg3?

Black has to try 34...exf3, but White is also winning after 35 ♖xf3, since the d-pawn is terribly strong and f5 will fall as well.

35 ♗xe4! fxe4

Amazingly, the rook on g3 can't find a square that doesn't lose to ♗xf5 and/or ♗e5. The rest is easy for White:

36 hxg3 ♟g7 37 ♖d4 ♟f7 38 ♖xe4 ♖d8 39 ♖e7 ♖xd5 40 ♖xb7 h5 41 ♖a7 a5 42 a4 1-0

Petursson – Laketić

Aosta 1990

1 c4 e5 2 ♟c3 ♗b4 3 g3 ♗xc3

Already ceding the bishop-pair; this is part of the modern arsenal, as described in the last section.

4 bxc3 ♟c6 5 ♗g2 ♟ge7 6 d4 0-0 7 e3 d6 8 ♟e2 ♟a5!?

A very interesting decision. On the one hand, it immediately targets a weakness in White's position and forces the action. On the other hand, Black has not completed his development, so there is a certain risk involved. Petursson mentions both 8...b6 and 8...♗d7. Now White sacrifices a pawn.

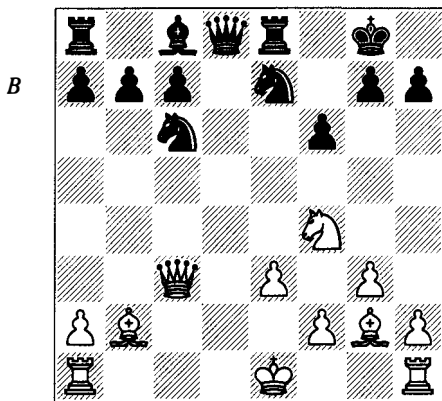
9 c5! dxc5 10 ♖a3 cxd4 11 cxd4 exd4

Petursson gives 11...♟c4 12 ♖c5 exd4 13 ♜xd4!, counting upon the bishops in an ending.

12 ♜xd4! ♟ac6

Here 12...♜xd4? is just a blunder due to 13 ♟xd4 ♜e8 14 ♟b5!.

13 ♜c3 ♜e8 14 ♖b2 f6 15 ♟f4 (D)



A good illustration of how the bishops can be a decisive force in and of themselves. Black has only a slightly weakened pawn structure (in response to White's queen-bishop battery, of course), and yet the bishops rake his position. White's pressure is long-term, as will be seen. Black now reorganizes.

15...♜d6 16 ♜b3+ ♟h8 17 0-0 ♟e5 18 h3!

This move restricts the squares to which Black's bishop can go. Also, having done its job on b2, the dark-squared bishop is ready to transfer to a3.

18...a5 19 ♖a3 ♜a6 20 ♜fd1 ♟7c6 21 ♜ac1 ♟f5 22 e4 ♟d7 23 ♟d5 ♖e6

So Black has got his pieces out. But now his knights are driven back; traditionally, the way in which bishops exert their strength is first to restrict the knights, and then force them to retreat, followed by a pawn breakthrough.

24 f4 ♟d7 25 ♜c3 ♜ac8 26 ♖b2?!

Inaccurate; Petursson give 26 ♜d2 with a clear edge.

26...♟xd5 27 exd5 ♟e7?

Black misses his opportunity for 27...♟b4, which Petursson assesses as unclear.

28 ♜e1! h6

Black creates an escape square, as 28...♟f5 29 ♜xc7! is fully sound.

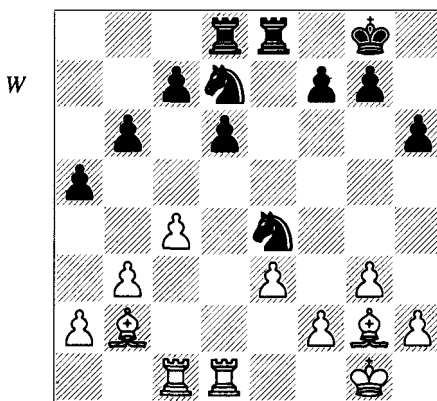
29 ♜e6 ♜a7+ 30 ♟h2 ♟f5

This fails, but Black can hardly move, and 31 ♜el was threatened. The rest is straightforward.

31 ♜e1 ♟d6 32 ♜xc7! ♜xc7 33 ♜xe8+ ♟h7 34 ♜b1+ f5 35 ♜e7 ♟e4 1-0

In view of 36 ♜xg7+.

Next, we look at a great master of bishop play, first improving his position and then sacrificing a pawn to enhance the bishops' effect.



Kramnik – Ulybin
Khalkidhiki 1992

White begins by centralizing his king, primarily so that he can throw his kingside pawns forward with rooks behind them.

23 ♟f1 ♜e7 24 ♟e2 ♜de8 25 g4! ♜e6 26 h4 ♜6e7 27 ♟f3 ♟dc5 28 ♟d5

White intends g5. Black's next is very interesting, countering with his own threat of ...♟b4. He thus lures the white queenside pawns forward, and even succeeds in making his c5-square a permanent outpost. But as so often, the space advantage and squares White captures with his pawn advance enhance the strength of the bishop-pair.

28...♟a6 29 a3! ♟ac5

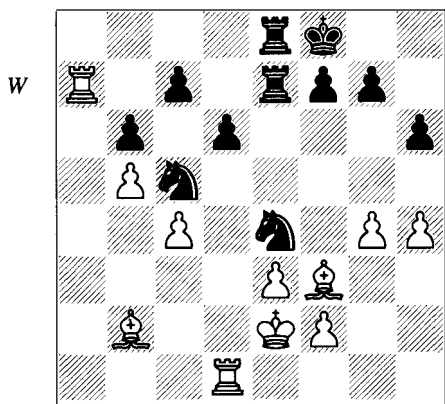
The tactic 29...♟ec5 30 g5! ♟xb3 31 ♜g1 rips open lines (31...h5 32 g6).

30 b4 axb4 31 axb4 ♟a6 32 b5! ♟ac5 33 ♜a1 ♟f6 34 ♜dd1

White keeps the bishop-pair, foregoing 34 ♟xf6 gxf6, which naturally favours him as well.

34...♟fe4 35 ♜a7 ♟f8 (D)

36 g5!!



A beautiful and far-seeing pawn sacrifice, which finally guarantees activity for both his rooks and bishops.

36...hxg5 37 hxg5 ♖xg5 38 ♙c6 ♜c8 39 ♜h1 ♔g8 40 ♚aa1!

With the simple idea of doubling on the h-file. Even with reduced material, an attack based on two rooks and two bishops is quite fearsome.

40...♜ce6

For example, Kramnik gives 40...f6 41 ♙d5+ ♜f7 42 ♜ag1 ♔f8 43 ♜h7.

41 ♜h4 f6

Another nice line is 41...♜h7 42 ♜ah1 ♜ef8 43 ♙e4 g6 44 ♙d5, winning, because Black can do nothing versus f4-f5!.

42 ♜g1 ♔f7 43 ♙d5 ♔e8 44 ♜h8+ ♜f8 45 f4 ♜ge6 46 ♔f3 f5

After 46...♜b8, White can win in several ways, e.g., Kramnik gives 47 ♙xe6 ♜xe6 48 ♜xg7 ♜e7 49 ♙xf6 ♜f7 50 ♙d4.

47 ♜g6 ♜c5 48 ♙xg7 ♜f7 49 ♙xf8 1-0

We conclude this chapter with lightly-annotated examples of two other world-class players offering a pawn for a powerful pair of bishops.

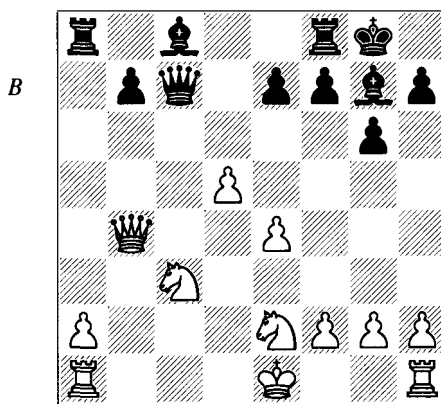
Kacheishvili – Svidler

Under-18 World Ch, Szeged 1994

1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♜c3 d5 4 cxd5 ♜xd5 5 ♙d2 ♙g7 6 e4 ♜b6 7 ♙e3 0-0 8 ♙e2 ♜c6 9 d5 ♜e5 10 ♙d4 c5 11 ♙xc5 ♜ec4 12 ♙xc4 ♜xc4 13 ♜b3 ♜xb2! 14 ♜xb2 ♜c7 15 ♙b4 a5 16 ♜ge2 axb4 17 ♜xb4 (D)

So Black has sacrificed a pawn for the bishop-pair. The amazing thing is how casually

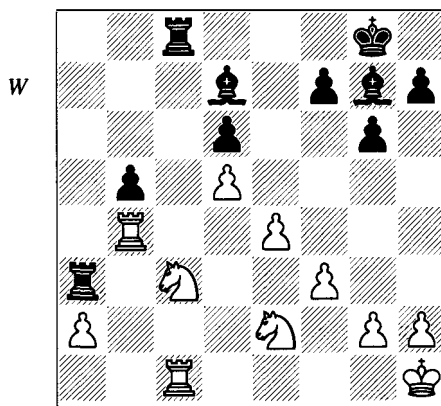
he leaves other pawns hanging and then exchanges queens in the next few moves, counting on his bishops to maintain the advantage.



17...♙g4 18 f3 ♙d7 19 0-0 b5 20 ♔h1!?

For example, 20 ♜xe7 ♜fe8 21 ♜b4 ♙f8 22 ♜b3? b4 23 ♜d1 ♜a3 24 ♜b1 ♙b5 and Black is winning. Probably 20 ♜ab1 was better than the text-move, after which Black calmly offers to exchange queens.

20...♜d6! 21 ♜xd6 exd6 22 ♜ab1 ♜fb8 23 ♜b4 ♜a3 24 ♜c1 ♜c8 (D)



25 ♜b3

A simple demonstration of Black's superior activity is 25 ♜xb5 ♜xc1+ 26 ♜xc1 ♜e3!.

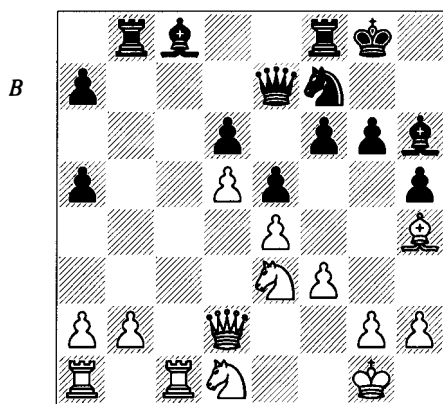
25...♜xb3 26 axb3 ♜a8! 27 ♜b1?

27 ♜c2 is a tougher defence.

27...♜a3! 28 ♜d1 ♜a2 29 ♜f4 b4! 30 ♜d3 ♜e2! 31 g3 ♙b5 32 ♜xb4 ♜e1+ 33 ♔g2 ♙d4 34 ♜c2?

A more appealing continuation given by Svidler is 34 ♔h3 ♙f1+ 35 ♔g4 h5+ 36 ♔g5

♖g7 37 ♘c2 ♙f6+ 38 ♖f4 g5+ 39 ♖f5 ♙h3+
40 g4 ♙xg4+! 41 fxg4 ♜f1+ 42 ♘f2 ♜xf2#!
34...♞e2+ 0-1



Shirov – Topalov

Vienna 1996

In section ‘a’, we already discussed the drawbacks to giving up the bishop-pair just to double the opponent’s rook’s pawns. That is what has occurred here, but White seems to stand fairly solidly and directly threatens the pawn on a5.

20...♘g5!?

So Topalov sacrifices it! Since 21 ♙xg5?! fxg5! 22 ♜xa5 g4 is very dangerous, Shirov decides to capture straightaway.

21 ♜xa5 f5 22 ♜e1?

Shirov gives a long line starting with 22 ♙xg5 ♜xg5!, eventually leading to equality.

22...fxe4 23 fxe4 ♜f4 24 ♙xg5 ♜xg5 25 ♜c4 ♙a6?

Although Black keeps the advantage after this, best was 25...♙d7! with the idea of ...♜bf8 and ...♙b5, which Shirov simply calls winning. The rest of the game contains various mistakes, but in the end, the bishops are still of decisive importance:

26 ♜c6! ♙d3 27 ♜ac1 ♜bf8 28 ♜c8! ♙xe4 29 ♘f2 ♜4f7? 30 ♜xf8+ ♜xf8 31 ♜c3 ♜f4 32 ♜e2? ♙b1! 33 a3 ♜d4 34 g3 a5 35 ♜e1 e4 36 ♖g2 ♙d3 37 ♘fd1 ♜f6 38 h4 g5 39 ♘f2 ♜f3+ 40 ♖g1 gxh4 0-1

A Practical Digression

For the most part, people read chess books in order to improve their own game. A typical

reader, having slogged through this very lengthy chapter and the three before it, might therefore ask: ‘OK, but what’s the message here? What should I do with my minor pieces? Give me some guidance!’.

This is not primarily intended as an instructional book, but let me talk about instructional books for a moment. To address the subject before us, the handling of minor pieces, such books almost inevitably make the same presentation, along the lines of: ‘Are bishops better than knights? It depends upon the position.’ They then proceed to state that bishops like open positions and knights like closed ones, after which follows a set of ridiculously one-sided examples to prove that point (normally with the inferior side having additional weaknesses). And that’s the extent of it. As Suba complains about middlegame books in general, they teach ‘only the art of playing against very weak opposition’, i.e. someone who has given us every advantage which we could desire, without bothering to create counterplay.

So the first question for those of you looking to improve your game is: do existing instructional books help by showing you such unambiguous examples? My answer would be that, above the 1800 level, this is at best only marginally helpful. Good players won’t give you such a stereotyped minor-piece advantage; and if you go by rules like ‘open the position when you have the bishops’, or if you dawdle and try to ‘close the position when you have the knights’, you will consistently be killed by players who understand how seldom and poorly such rules apply.

The point is, there’s no easy answer to genuinely improving your game, with respect to minor-piece play or otherwise. As a teacher, I know that students are always looking for convenient generalities to ‘get a handle’ on chess and its intricacies. But if there is a practical side to this book, it is the message that abstract rules and principles are of limited usefulness. Experience and thoughtful study will provide you with a better and more delicate positional judgement than a set of rules ever could. Good players look at concrete sequences of moves and assess the resulting positions, not according to some artificial construct about which piece likes which kind of position, but in line

with their own judgement, refined by years of thinking about similar positions. If you are familiar enough with the relevant type of position, then you won't need a rule; if you aren't, then your own judgement (based on the concrete situation before you) will be more trustworthy and precise than any rule you could employ. Therefore, although you won't instantly handle

your minor pieces better by reading this chapter, its study will at least add to your repertoire of positions and the concepts tied to them. Hopefully, you might also develop a more open mind towards the possibilities inherent in minor-piece positions. I would view with suspicion any chess book which claims to do more than that.

8 The Exchange Sacrifice

The increasing frequency of the exchange sacrifice is probably the most widely-acknowledged change in modern chess technique. Fortunately, so many books and articles have covered this phenomenon that I need not justify it as a valid concept. Moreover, you need only pick up an *Informator*, or any magazine with recent games, to find good examples of exchange sacrifices. In what follows, I have therefore chosen to concentrate on the historical evolution of the exchange sacrifice. We will see how its function has changed over the years, and how current players are employing it in ever more imaginative ways.

First, what do we mean by an 'exchange sacrifice'? Obviously, the sacrifice of a rook for a bishop or a knight. But in this book, we are not concerned with such a sacrifice if it is immediately followed by a mating attack, or by the achievement of material superiority. For this reason, the term 'positional exchange sacrifice' is sometimes used, to indicate that the exchange is given up in order to establish long-term advantages which the sacrificer hopes will ultimately repay him. Indeed, most of the examples below are of this nature. But I should add that one can sacrifice the exchange for a long-term initiative or attack, in which the primary justification is tactical rather than positional, even though the resolution of that attack cannot be accurately foreseen. In such cases, the compensation may have a positional basis, for example a dangerous knight outpost next to the enemy king, but I think 'long-term' best describes the set of sacrifices we will be concerned with here.

Origins

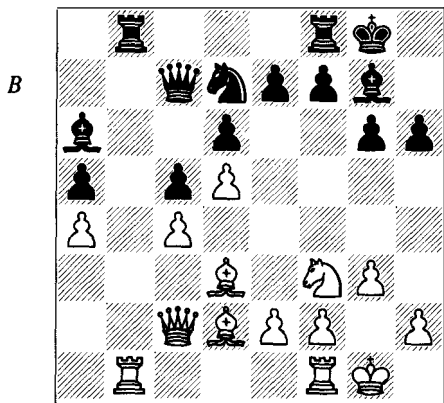
Was the exchange sacrifice unknown previous to the modern era? Of course not, but the reader can conduct an experiment which is perhaps more powerful than any statistics I could quote. Look through a book of classic brilliant victories from before 1935 and see how many of

them include an exchange sacrifice (in the long-term sense described above). One might also look at the World Championship matches up to that time for the same purpose; or examine collections of games by Lasker, Tarrasch, Rubinstein, Capablanca, or any of the other masters of the pre-1930 era. Now do the same thing with a book of famous victories from, say, the last 30 years; and examine the games collections of Botvinnik, Petrosian, Karpov, Kasparov, or indeed, of any modern grandmaster. This exercise should dispel any doubt that the exchange sacrifice is part and parcel of modern chess in a way that it never was before the 1930s.

Another telling indication of change in the attitude towards the value of the exchange appears when we look at the analysis of the older masters in tournament books, games collections, and opening books. Time and again, variations are dismissed because one side or the other wins the exchange, although the other side might have a pawn, active play, and an 'obviously' better game if that exchange is captured. Certainly one of the repeated errors of early opening analysts is that they considered some line or other inferior or not worthy of attention because they failed to appreciate powerful compensation for the exchange. Today, the exchange sacrifice is so second-nature to the professional that this type of oversight is much less common.

It is instructive to search pre-1930 databases for successful exchange sacrifices. Almost without exception, we find compensation only from direct mating attacks and/or the immediate acquisition of at least two pawns for the exchange. Long-term sacrifices are seldom seen; one feels that this simply must reflect a pre-modern attachment to static material evaluations. There are nevertheless a few precursors of the modern attitude. Tarrasch himself, in annotating a game between Janowski and Lasker from 1909 (won by Janowski, the exchange down), commented that a knight in the middle

of the board, protected by a pawn and out of the range of any enemy pawn, is nearly as strong as a rook. And once in a while, we see a quite modern-looking idea:



Selezniev – Alekhine
Triberg 1921

The position looks innocent enough, and one might expect mass exchanges along the b-file. Instead, Black uncorks...

20...♖b4!

We should not be surprised that Alekhine, who shared so many stylistic characteristics with modern players, would find this shot. The first point is that if White doesn't take the rook, 21...♗fb8 intending ...♗b2 will force him to do so.

21 ♙xb4 cxb4

Now White is an exchange up with even pawns. So what is Alekhine's idea? He wants to gain certain positional advantages, namely, use of the c5-square as a powerful knight outpost, a protected passed pawn on b4, the two bishops, and pressure on White's now-backward c4-pawn along an open file. In addition, White's bishop is bad on d3, and his a-pawn is more vulnerable than it was, due to the possibility of ...♙c5.

22 ♘d2 ♙c5?

This shows that Alekhine was not depending upon lengthy calculations, but made his sacrifice on principle. In fact, this knight move allows a clever reply. Alekhine shows that the correct sequence was 22...♗c8!, to pressure the c-pawn, when ...♙c3 or ...♙b6 will follow, with the subsequent win of a pawn. Black would have

more than enough play for the exchange in that case.

23 ♙b3!

Alekhine had missed this. Now on 23...♙xa4, White plays 24 ♗a1! ♙c5 25 ♙xa5 ♙xa1 26 ♗xa1 (threatening ♙xg6) 26...♙g7 27 ♙c6 with advantage. So Black voluntarily loses a whole tempo:

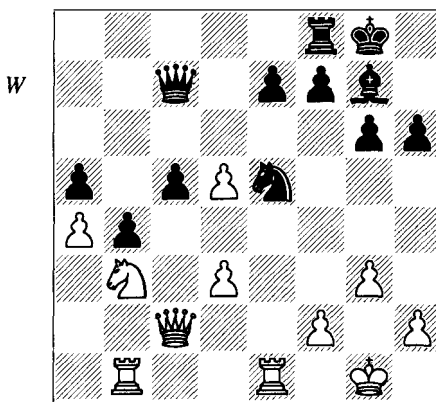
23...♙d7 24 c5!

Freeing the d3-bishop. Black wins a pawn, but he no longer has White so tied down. Still, his powerful bishop and well-placed knight gives him compensation for the very slight material deficit.

24...♙xd3 25 exd3 dxc5 26 ♗fe1

If 26 ♗c4, Alekhine had planned 26...♗d6!, intending 27 ♙xa5 ♙e5, hitting f3 and d3.

26...♙e5 (D)



27 ♗e3

Alekhine gives the line 27 ♗xc5 ♙f3+ 28 ♙f1 ♗xc5 29 ♙xc5 ♙d2+ 30 ♙g2 ♙xb1 31 ♗xb1 ♗d8! as better for Black. Disagreeing, Euwe and Kramer come up with the 'correction' 28 ♙g2! ♙xe1+ 29 ♗xe1 ♗xc5 30 ♙xc5 ♗c8 31 ♙b3, to free White's game (this looks about equal). But instead of 30...♗c8, 30...♗d8! looks quite strong. Such lines reinforce the idea that Black has adequate compensation, despite missing a chance to be better on move 22.

27...♗c8 28 ♗c1 ♗d7!?

It's hard to criticize this aggressive move, which not only threatens d5 but intends to probe White's light-square weaknesses. Nevertheless, 28...♗d8! would be difficult to meet, not losing a tempo to ♙xc5 in the key line 29 d4 ♙g4 30 ♗e4 ♙f6.

29 d4 ♖g4 30 ♜e4 c4!?

Now 30...♗f6 31 ♗xc5 ♜d8 is unclear.

31 ♗xc5 ♜f5 32 ♜e2 b3!?

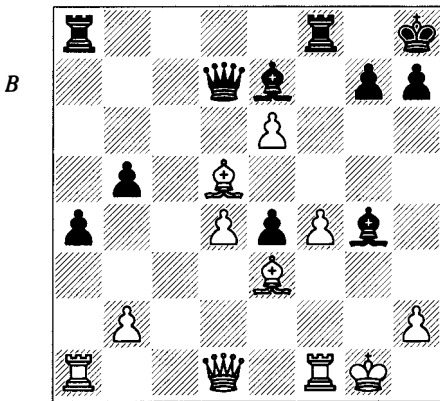
This speculative attempt to cash in on the passed pawns succeeds. In reality, however, Black should probably opt for 32...♗xf2!, e.g., 33 ♜xf2 ♜xd5! (33...♜xf2+ 34 ♗xf2 f5 35 ♜e3 ♗xd4 36 ♗b3!) and Black has three pawns and multiple threats for the rook (combinations of ...f5 and ...♜d8 win back more material).

33 ♜xg4?

White gets confused; he should play 33 ♜xg4!, when 33...b2 34 ♜b1 ♜xg4 35 ♜xg4 c3 36 ♗d3 holds the pawns. After the text-move, Black regains his material and still has attacking chances, which he soon converts into a winning game:

33...b2 34 ♜xb2 ♜xg4 35 ♜xc4 h5 36 ♜c2 h4 37 ♜d3 ♜d8 38 f3 ♜h5 39 ♜e4 hxg3 40 hxg3 ♜g5 41 ♗g2 ♜d2+ 42 ♗h3 ♗f6 43 ♜c2 ♜h6+ 44 ♗g2 ♗g7 45 g4 ♜h8 46 ♗f2 ♜b8 47 ♗e2 ♜b4 48 ♜d2 ♜h2+ 49 ♗e3 ♜g1+ 50 ♗e2 ♗xd4

...and Black went on to win.



Treybal – Spielmann
Teplitz Schönau 1922

Black could simply play 21...♜xd5 22 ♜xg4 ♜f5 with an definite advantage; but Spielmann, always a romantic attacking player, makes the interesting decision to sacrifice an exchange:

21...♗xe6!? 22 ♗xa8 ♜xa8 23 ♜c2 ♗c4!

Trying to maximize the power of the bishops. Now 24 ♜xe4? ♗d5 will win the queen, so White must play passively. This position has a modern look, in that Black's two strong bishops

and potential passed pawn on the queenside offer more than adequate compensation for the exchange. In what follows, the play is not terribly accurate, but Black wears down the white defences and wins without too much trouble.

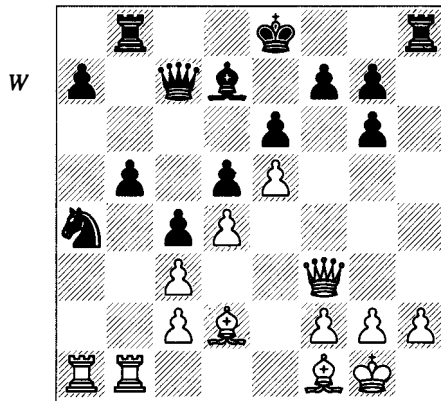
24 ♜f2 ♗d3 25 ♜d2 b4!?

A more direct method was 25...♗f6, e.g., 26 ♜b4 ♜h3 27 ♜d2 ♜d8, etc.

26 ♗h1 b3 27 ♜g2 ♜b7 28 f5!? a3 29 f6 ♗xf6 30 ♜xa3 ♜xa3 31 bxa3 ♗c2 32 ♜g1 ♜c8 33 a4? ♜f5! 34 a5 ♜f3+ 35 ♜g2 h5 36 ♗g1 b2 0-1

A Conceptual Leap

When books discuss the exchange sacrifice, there's a justifiable tendency to refer to Petrosian, who made some stunning and creative offers (see below). More recently, a number of top players have made a living off exchange sacrifices; McDonald's *Positional Sacrifices*, for example, devotes a whole chapter to Karpov's efforts in this regard. Today, in fact, every top player looks for opportunities to benefit from an appropriate exchange sacrifice. But the first world-class player to draw attention to a new assessment for this material imbalance was Botvinnik. He was, to be sure, only one contributor to a conceptual revolution originating with Soviet players in the 1930s and 1940s, and in fact did not often offer his rooks for minor pieces. But several of his games captured the new spirit and strongly influenced generations to come.



Tolush – Botvinnik
USSR Ch, Moscow 1945

Black has gone to a lot of trouble to grab a pawn in the opening, and now he faces some difficulty in countering White's activity. With the next move, White aims his bishop at the sensitive dark squares.

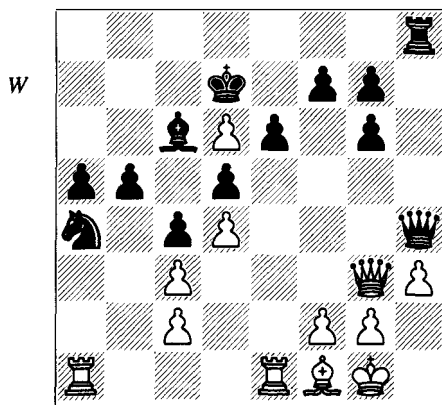
18 ♖c1 a5 19 ♖a3 ♜b6

Now 20 ♖d6 can be answered by 20... ♜xd6 with two pawns for the exchange. White's next move strengthens the ♖d6 idea and threatens ♜g5.

20 ♜g3 ♜d8 21 ♖d6 ♜xd6!

Anyway! This is the sort of move that computers still don't suggest, even as a fourth option. After all, there are no threats and Black is a pawn up. But the modern player knows from experience that, in the long run, White can advance on the kingside and activate his bishop-pair. By giving up the exchange, Black changes the equation completely, because he gets a pawn and long-term chances on the queenside for the exchange, and most importantly, he can completely neutralize White's chances.

22 exd6 ♖c6 23 h3 ♜d7! 24 ♜e1 ♜h4! (D)



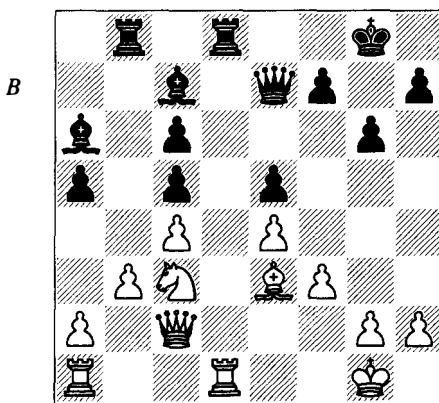
Not only will the d6-pawn fall if queens are exchanged, but White will simply have to wait around for Black to break on the queenside.

25 ♜e5 ♜f6 26 ♜g3 ♜h4 27 ♜e3 ♜f4 28 ♖e2 ♜h4 29 ♖f3 b4! 30 ♜xh4 ♜xh4 31 g3 ♜h8!

Black isn't diverted by 31... ♜xh3 32 cxb4 axb4 33 ♜b1. The rest of the game almost plays itself since, with this queenside and central structure, Black's knight is worth a whole rook.

32 cxb4 axb4 33 ♜b1 ♜b8 34 h4 ♜b7 35 ♜h2 ♜xd6 36 g4 ♜c3 37 ♜a1 ♜b5 38 ♜d1 ♜a7 39 h5 g5 40 ♜g2 ♜a2 41 ♖e2 0-1

After 41... ♜xc2, the two passed pawns decide easily.



Liublinsky – Botvinnik

Moscow Ch 1943

This example is perhaps over-used in the texts, but it is a forerunner of hundreds of similar sacrifices. Black has been outplayed, and is now faced with threats like ♜f2 and ♖a4, winning the c-pawn. Black's bishops are just pathetic, stuck behind their own pawns, and White's position has no weaknesses. One would expect White to win this position over 95% of the time; for example, what if he takes the rooks off on the open file? Black can hardly live with his pawn weaknesses in a simplified position. But Botvinnik finds an all-star defensive solution:

25... ♜d4!!

So simple, and yet shocking at the time. If White takes the enemy rook, Black's pawns are straightened out (with a protected passed pawn; compare the Alekhine example above), and his two bishops will actually have something to do.

26 ♖e2!!

Soltis approves of this move, saying 'better to give up a knight than a bishop'. In fact, although the move itself is not bad, the idea behind it is bad. As others have pointed out, 26 ♖xd4! cxd4 27 ♖a4 was correct, so that after ♖b2-d3, the knight can take up an ideal blocking post on d3. Black could still try to scare up play by, e.g., 27...c5 28 ♖b2 ♖b7 with the idea 29 ♖d3 (the prophylactic 29 ♜f1! ♜f8 30 ♜a1 is a nice alternative) 29...f5 30 ♜e1 ♜f8, perhaps hoping to swing the bad c7-bishop

around to e3 via g5. Of course, White is simply better if he plays carefully, but not so easily as he would have been had Black omitted 25...♖d4.

26...♙c8 27 ♜xd4?!

Of course, White hasn't lost anything after 27 ♙xd4! cxd4, when again I like 28 ♜f1! ♙e6 29 ♜ae1 f5 30 ♜c1. Alternatively, White could play for queenside expansion.

27...cxd4 28 ♙f2?

Now *this* move, generally ignored, strikes me as a very serious mistake. As Euwe and Nunn point out, White needs to break on the queenside. A plausible sequence would be, for example, 28 ♙d2 c5 29 a3 f5 30 ♜db1, to meet the game plan 30...f4 (30...♙h8 is better, but 31 ♜b2 still prepares b4) with 31 b4! axb4 32 axb4 cxb4 33 ♜b3, etc.

After the text move, Botvinnik shows what two bishops and a kingside advance can do.

28...c5 29 ♜f1 f5 30 ♙g3 ♙d7 31 ♜ad1 f4! 32 ♙f2 g5 33 g4?!

Weakening. It's not easy to counter Black's idea of ...h5, ...g4, ...♙h8 and ...♜g8; but running to the queenside by 33 ♜fe1 and ♙f1-e2 seems like a sound idea. The rest of the game is typical, in that the rooks can only wait around for the bishops to become active. Black is already better.

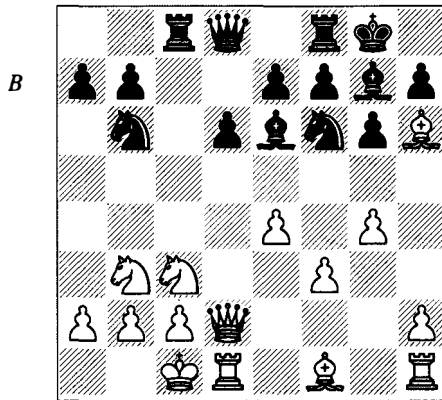
33...fxg3 34 ♙xg3 ♙h3 35 ♜f2 h5 36 ♜fd2 h4 37 ♙f2 ♜f8 38 ♜d3 ♜f4 39 ♙h1 ♙h7 40 ♜g1 ♙d8 41 ♙e2 ♜f7 42 ♜d1 ♙h5 43 ♙e3 43 ♙e1 g4!.

43...♜xf3+ 44 ♜xf3 ♜xf3 45 ♙xg5 ♙xd3 46 ♙xd8 ♜e3 47 ♙b6 ♜xe4 48 ♙xc5 ♜e2 49 ♜d1 ♙g4 50 h3 ♙xh3 51 b4 ♙f5 52 ♙d6 d3 53 bxa5 h3 0-1

It is interesting to see how theoreticians reacted to the new situation. In *The Middle Game*, for example, Euwe seemed compelled to proclaim: "The advantage of the exchange is decisive. There can be no two opinions about this, and it is necessary to begin this chapter by stating it definitively." Why was this necessary? Because Euwe was uncomfortable with all the games coming out of the Soviet Union in which the side the exchange down kept winning! And he was quick to add something that wouldn't have been in the old manuals: that having the two bishops and a protected passed pawn or a

weakened enemy king position "must be reckoned as full compensation". Remarkably, in the very short introduction to the whole of Volume 1, he concludes with a paragraph on this very topic, stating: "Compensation for the exchange in terms of positional advantage is a theme which has attracted a lot of attention lately, especially on account of a number of games played in Russia. It seems that it is easier to obtain full compensation than had formerly been supposed." Obviously, the issue was preying on his mind. Which is to his credit, because a lot of the western players didn't seem to fully catch on the new state of affairs until 30 or 40 years later.

If I listed the early players from the USSR who contributed to the discovery of the countless types of positions in which the exchange could be given up for long-term play, I would undoubtedly omit some deserving names. Just to name a few, Boleslavsky, Bondarevsky, Lillienthal and, a bit later, Bronstein and Geller were great contributors. Pachman points out these two examples from that era:



Panov – Simagin
Moscow 1943

From this typical Sicilian position, one might expect, for example, 12...♙c4 13 ♙xc4 ♙xc4 14 h4 with an attack. Instead, Simagin plays the remarkable...

12...♙h8!!

'!!' not for soundness, but because of the time in which it was played. The idea of giving up material without getting enemy weaknesses or direct attack in return was simply beyond the

pale in the early 1940s. Today, even average players make such moves, an indication of the revolution which has taken place in the way that this material balance is assessed.

13 ♖xf8 ♜xf8 14 ♜d4 ♖c4

Black's compensation for the exchange is largely wrapped up with his dark-squared bishop, which has no counterpart and may be unleashed against the white king. This is a case where Black has no guarantee of not just ending up in an exchange-down ending, and whether 12...♖h8 is completely sound is open to question. In what follows, although both sides have alternatives on nearly every move, the course of the game itself indicates the kind of problems White faces.

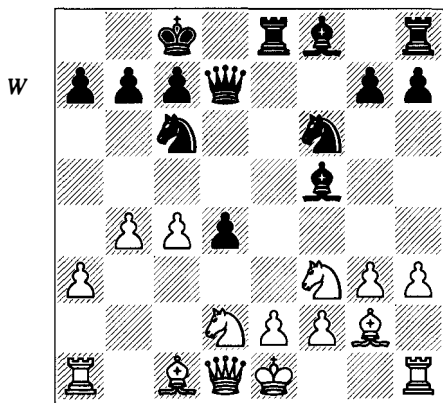
15 g5!? ♜d7!? 16 ♖h3 e6 17 ♜b1 ♜e5!? 18 f4 ♜f3!? 19 ♜xf3 ♖xc3 20 bxc3?

In Pachman, 18 f4 is queried and 18...♜f3 given '!!'. But at this juncture, 20 ♜xd6! seems to me a clear improvement; in lines after 20...♜e8 21 bxc3, the ability of the queen to retreat to b4 allows White to defend. But Black could have deviated earlier, and this is just a detail in a brilliant effort.

20...d5! 21 ♜c1 ♜a4 22 exd5 ♖xa2+! 23 ♜a1

Instead, 23 ♜xa2 ♜xc3+ 24 ♜b3 loses to 24...♜c5!. After 23 ♜a1, Black is a full rook down, but White's king is too exposed to survive:

23...♜c5 24 dxe6 ♜xc3 25 ♜d4 ♖xe6 26 ♖xe6 fxe6 27 ♜a4 ♜xa4 28 c4 ♜d8 29 ♜a2 ♜b4 30 ♜e1 ♜d3 31 ♜xe6 ♜c3+ 0-1



Bondarevsky – Mikenas

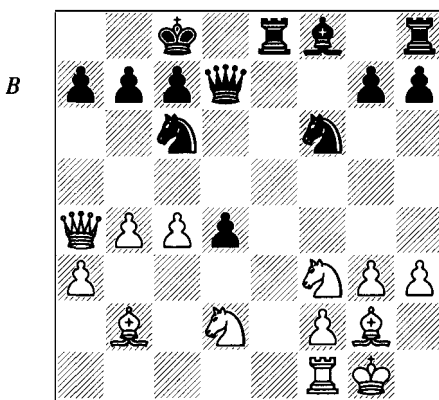
Moscow 1950

Black seems to be getting a strong attack for his pawn. He threatens 12...♖d3, and 12 0-0 ♖xh3 intending ...h5-h4 is at least unpleasant. White's choices seem limited, but he finds...

12 ♖b2!

So simple, once you see it! And I think that such moves got much easier to see, once players started thinking in terms of 'well, I'll only be an exchange down'.

12...♖d3 13 0-0! ♖xe2 14 ♜a4 ♖xf1 15 ♜xf1 (D)



The smoke has cleared and any modern player would want to be White. He has two bishops and a powerful attack, and his king is perfectly safe. All for a mere exchange!

15...♜b8 16 b5 ♜d8 17 ♜xd4 ♖c5 18 ♜b3 ♖xd4 19 ♖xd4 b6

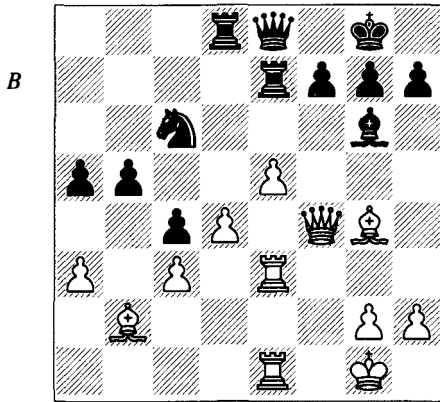
Pachman gives 19...a6 20 ♜a5, and adds that White's bishops are stronger than Black's rooks. The attack which follows is unstoppable:

20 c5 ♜e7 21 cxb6 cxb6 22 ♖xb6! axb6 23 ♜a8+ ♜c7 24 ♜a7+ ♜d6 25 ♜d1+ ♜e5 26 ♜xd7 ♜xd7 27 ♜c7+ ♜e6 28 ♜d4+ ♜f7 29 ♜f5 ♜e1+ 30 ♜h2 ♜d1 31 ♜c2! 1-0

Petrosian's Patent

Petrosian really put the 'positional' into the positional exchange sacrifice, and specialized in giving up the exchange to salvage apparently lost positions. This remarkable genius of the game repeatedly broke through the material barrier, finding new ways to exploit the good qualities of his minor pieces against suddenly sluggish rooks. I will simply quote snippets from his own 1982 lecture on the subject (reprinted

in *Petrosian's Legacy*), in order to bring his own ideas to the reader.



Reshevsky – Petrosian

Candidates tournament, Zurich 1953

This is a famous example. Petrosian explains how he didn't like his position, and saw that White could play h4 next, provoking kingside weakness, followed by the return of his bishop to c1 with attack. He then considered a number of ways to bring a knight to the ideal square d5. But playing 25...♖b8 (in order to follow up with ...♖d7-b6) allows 26 ♖f3 and d5, whereas a rook move like 25...♜b7 (to bring the knight to d5 via e7) could run into 26 e6 (or 26 ♖f3) 26...♖e7 27 ♖f3! ♖d5? 28 ♖xd5 ♜xd5 29 ♜f3, winning. Ultimately, he played a move 'so simple, there was no doubt of its correctness':

25...♜e6!!

Now we are in a different realm of creative sacrifices; I don't believe that this would have been played by another player in Petrosian's time, and probably by precious few today. The knight gets to d5 after all, supported by a stalwart pawn on e6 and an unopposed monster of a bishop on g6. Play continued:

26 a4 ♖e7 27 ♖xe6 fxe6 28 ♜f1 ♖d5 29 ♜f3 ♖d3

White now quite correctly returned the exchange (else ...b4 follows):

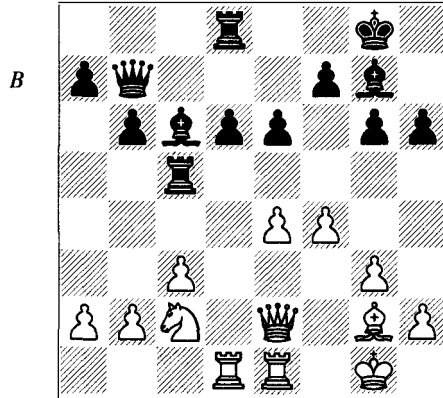
30 ♜xd3 cxd3 31 ♜xd3 b4 32 cxb4 axb4

Black's far superior minor piece secures a quick draw.

33 a5 ♜a8 34 ♜a1 ♜c6 35 ♖c1 ♜c7 36 a6 ♜b6 37 ♖d2 b3 38 ♜c4 h6 39 h3 b2 40 ♜b1 ♖h8 41 ♖e1 ½-½

An elegant masterpiece of strategy.

In the same year, Petrosian played what would now be considered a 'routine' exchange sacrifice to win the centre and enhance his two bishops. He begins with a rook seemingly out of place on the fourth rank (see Part 1, Chapter 7 for more on such rooks):



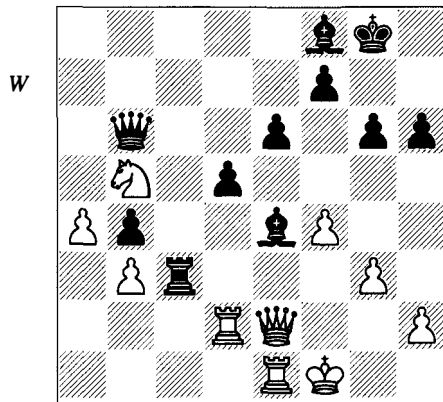
Troianescu – Petrosian

Bucharest 1953

22...b5! 23 ♜d2 ♜c4 24 a3 a5 25 ♖e3 ♜xe4! 26 ♖xe4 ♖xe4 27 ♖c2 d5 28 ♖d4 b4 29 cxb4 axb4 30 a4 ♜a7 31 ♜f2 ♜c8 32 b3 ♖f8!

With a terrific game, obviously. But it takes something else to win...

33 ♖b5 ♜a6 34 ♖e2 ♜b6+ 35 ♖f1 ♜c3! (D)

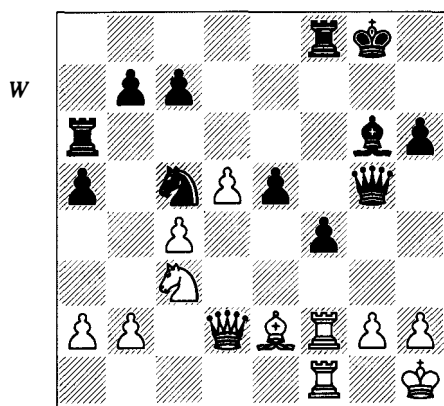


Another exchange sacrifice, of course! The game is soon decided:

36 ♖xc3 bxc3 37 ♜c2 ♜xb3 38 ♜e1 ♖b4 39 g4 ♖xc2 40 ♜xc2 ♜xa4

Black's pawns were much too strong; he won quickly.

More pathbreaking is the next example:



Petrosian – Gligorić
Varna Olympiad 1962

White is having one of those awful days against the King's Indian Defence. His minor pieces are vastly inferior, and his rooks are doing nothing. Black intends to play something like ... f6 , ... b6 and ... e4 , and both his minor pieces are potential invaders on d3. Against Kasparov, one might just consider resigning! But Petrosian plays the seemingly illogical...

26 f3 !!

What's this? White walks right into ... e4 . True, the immediate **26... d4 27 d4 !** is not impressive (27... d3 28 dxe4 and White is actually better; compare the game). But what will happen if Black simply prepares it?

26... f6 27 e1 !!

Again, so simple, yet so difficult! The exchange is meaningless compared with the possibility of winning e4 for a knight and activating the light-squared bishop. Instead, **27 e2 ?** loses to **27... d3 28 dxe4 29 dxd3 30 g3+ !**

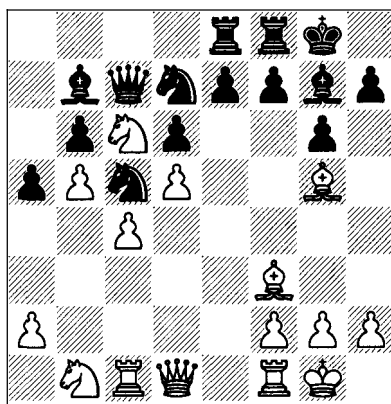
27... d3 28 f2 29 xe1 30 xe8 31 ff8

Petrosian: "If you have time to consider this position attentively, trying some lines, you should feel that the material plus means nothing."

31 d4 $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$

Petrosian: "He offered a draw. There is no sense for White to reject this offer; he has no reasons to play for a win."

B



Portisch – Petrosian
San Antonio 1972

White has been positionally better for some time, and now threatens to invade on e7. Petrosian realizes that this is his chance to turn the tables, and plays...

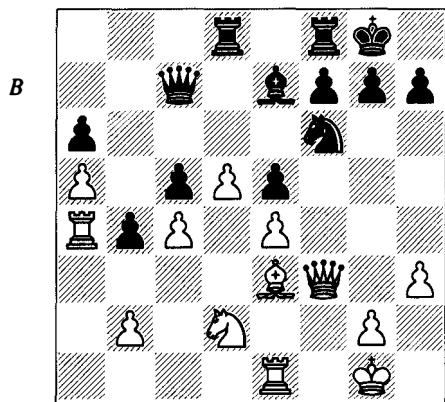
24... e5 !! 25 e7 !!

Petrosian: "He [Portisch] cannot decide whether I have sacrificed the exchange or blundered it away. Finally, after the game, Portisch said that he had decided that it was a blunder...". In fact, White should resist the temptation and play something like **25 dxe6 f6** with an unclear position.

25... f5 26 xf8 xf8

"White has a rook for a minor piece but no active play: all the files are closed. The black pawn stands on e5, not e7, so the white knight on c6 is very beautiful, but nothing else. Situations might arise where Black could have an extra piece in action ... Black undoubtedly has the edge." Petrosian continued with ... c8 , ... fd7 and ... f6 , but failed to advance his centre pawns accurately and only drew. Perhaps no other player had as many brilliant games which ended in a draw! By the way, this position is also an example of the irrelevant knight outpost on c6, as discussed in the 'Optical Illusions' section of Chapter 5.

Of the following position, Petrosian says: "White has a great positional advantage. He practically has an extra passed pawn on d5 ... when the game has transposed into an endgame ... the passed, well-protected pawn can be decisive."



Tal – Petrosian
Riga 1958

Here students of Nimzowitsch (or readers of any modern textbook) will quite naturally begin to think along the lines of the classic blockade by ... $\text{d}8\text{-d}6$ and perhaps trying to activate or exchange the bad bishop by ... $\text{g}5$ or ... $\text{h}4$ at some point. Well, neither of these plans can be achieved; but Petrosian figures out a way to justify the existence of his two minor pieces. Can you guess how?

25... $\text{d}6$!

A far-reaching and profound idea. Not only does Petrosian bring his rook over to a side of the board where it is supported by no other pieces and has no attacking chances, but he also plans to put his minor pieces on their 'worst' squares: the bishop on d6 and the knight on d7! We will soon see why.

26 $\text{b}3$ $\text{d}7$ 27 $\text{a}a1$ $\text{g}6$ 28 $\text{f}1$ $\text{d}6$ 29 $\text{h}4$ $\text{d}8$ 30 $\text{h}5$

Tal naturally wants to make the rook look silly.

30... $\text{f}6$ 31 $\text{g}4$ $\text{f}4$!

Suddenly, the whole point! As Petrosian said 25 years later: "my mind worked some other way then"!

32 $\text{xf}4$!?

Taking the bait. But the alternative 32 $\text{xf}4$ $\text{xf}4$ 33 $\text{xf}4$ $\text{xf}4$ 34 $\text{xf}4$ $\text{e}7$ intending ... $\text{e}5$ would be unclear, according to Petrosian, and at any rate "better than a cramped position with a material balance."

32... $\text{xf}4$ 33 $\text{d}2$ $\text{e}5$ 34 $\text{xf}4$?

After 34 $\text{e}2$, Petrosian gives 34... $\text{g}5$ or 34... $\text{h}4$. "Tal realized that events were taking

a bad turn for him, so he tried to complicate matters." But in the ensuing complications, Black gains a pawn for the exchange with excellent attacking chances:

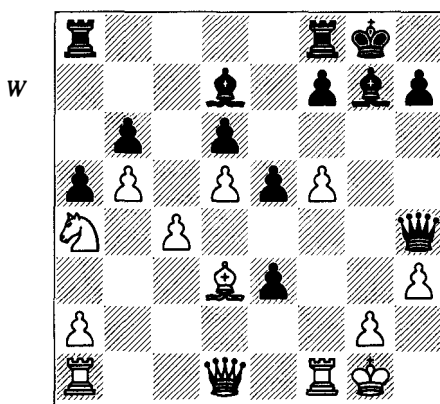
34... $\text{xc}4$ 35 $\text{e}5$ $\text{xe}5$ 36 $\text{e}4$ $\text{h}6$ 37 $\text{a}e1$ $\text{b}8$ 38 $\text{d}1$ $\text{c}4$ 39 $\text{d}6$ $\text{d}3$ 40 $\text{g}4$ $\text{a}7+$ 41 $\text{h}1$ $\text{f}5$ 42 $\text{f}6+$ $\text{h}8$ 43 $\text{xc}4$ $\text{xb}2$ 44 $\text{xa}6$ $\text{xd}1$ 45 $\text{xa}7$ $\text{xd}6$ 46 $\text{d}7$ $\text{xf}6$ 47 $\text{xd}1$ $\text{b}8$

At this point, Black is much better, but he failed to convert the position to a win, once again only drawing!

Petrosian sacrificed many other exchanges, and of course, he often actually won the games in which he did so. Since his time, no top player has been able to ignore the exchange sacrifice, which has permeated modern chess.

The Unfinished Product

It would seem that the games of the last section would be hard to top. But modern chess has taken the exchange sacrifice and found ever more outrageous applications for it. Let's start with an example of exchange-down play in a simplified position.



Seirawan – Kožul
Wijk aan Zee 1991

White to move has to deal with ideas such as ... $\text{e}4$ and ... $\text{d}4$. The most tempting move (which many players would conclude is forced) is 19 $\text{xb}6$!?, with unfathomable complications. But Black seems to be holding his own after either 19... $\text{e}4$ (e.g., 20 $\text{f}6$ $\text{xf}6$ 21 $\text{xf}6$ $\text{xf}6$ 22 $\text{xd}7$ $\text{f}2+$ 23 $\text{h}1$ $\text{exd}3$ 24 $\text{g}4+$

♙h8 25 ♖d4+ f6 26 ♘xf8 ♙xf8 27 ♖xd3 e2), or 19...♖d4 20 ♙h1 ♖xb6 21 f6! ♖d4! 22 fxg7 ♙xg7 with the idea of ...e4 or ...f5. Instead, Seirawan uncorks...

19 ♖g4!!

Once you see White's strategy as a whole, this may seem obvious. But to give up the exchange in a simplified position without even winning the b6-pawn seems like sheer lunacy.

19...♖xg4 20 hxg4 e4 21 ♙e2!

The whole point, which had to be foreseen. Taking the e-pawn would be suicidal, activating Black's rooks, and the 'natural' 21 f6 loses to 21...exd3 22 fxg7 (22 ♘xb6 ♙h6! and ...e2, among others) 22...♙fb8!, when Black's pawns are too strong.

21...♙xa1 22 ♙xa1 ♙ab8 23 ♙h2

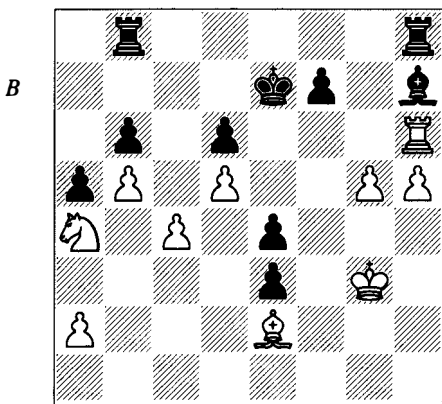
So what have we here? White would love to play ♙g3-f4, with a dominating position (look at Black's 'good' bishop!). But what about trying to free Black's pieces?

23...h5! 24 gxh5 ♙xf5

White is still a full exchange down, after all. At this point, White made a good move, but not the best:

25 ♙g3?!

Seirawan mentions an incredible alternative here, which simply wins the game outright! Don't believe it? Here is his analysis (supplemented by my own): 25 ♙f1! ♙h7 26 ♙f6! ♙fd8 27 g4! ♙f8 28 ♙g3 ♙e7 29 ♙h6 ♙h8 30 g5 (D).



Now the drastic extent of White's bind has become clear. The move g6 alone is often enough to win, but White has the luxury of improving his position as well, e.g., 30...♙d7 31

♙f4! ♙c7 32 ♙xe3 ♙bg8 33 ♙f4 e3 34 ♙f6 and Black is helpless.

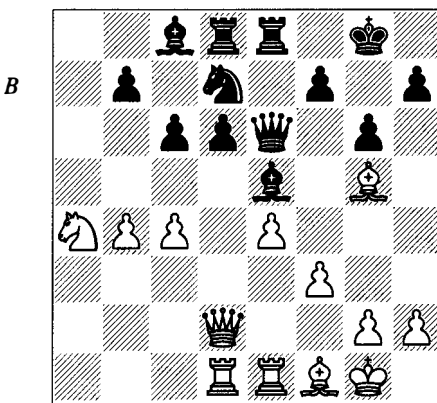
The game was also instructive, but not quite as convincing:

25...♙g7 26 ♙f4 ♙h7 27 g4! f6 28 ♘c3 ♙h6 29 ♘d1 ♙be8 30 ♘e3 ♙e5 31 ♙f1 ♙g8 32 ♙d1 f5? 33 ♙e2! ♙g5 34 c5! bxc5 35 b6 ♙e8 36 gxh5 ♙b8 37 ♙b1 ♙gg8 38 b7 ♙g7 39 ♙b6 ♙f7 40 ♙a6 ♙e7 41 ♙c6 ♙d7 42 ♙c8 1-0

A brilliant effort.

The exchange sacrifice seems to become ever more routine, and at the same time, ever more exotic. By this I mean that there are a great number of standard positions in which exchange sacrifices are second nature, for example, ...♙xc3 in various Sicilians and especially in the Dragon Variation, or ...♙xf3 in a wide variety of French Defences. In both of these cases, Black gains the advantage of split and doubled pawns in the enemy camp; but he also tends either to win a centre pawn or to gain control over key central squares. At the same time, every tournament brings us new and exciting ways to sacrifice the exchange. Let's look at a couple of examples of the more radical kind.

The speculative tactical exchange sacrifice has become common. Not surprisingly, Tal provides us with an early, not fully sound, example:



Glorigić – Tal

Leipzig Olympiad 1960

Black has all sorts of difficulties here, with the d6-pawn, among other things. Tal seizes the opportunity to change the dynamics of the contest in radical style:

23...c5!? 24 bxc5 dxc5 25 ♖xd8 ♕d4+ 26 ♖h1 ♖xd8

Well, this seems a bit absurd, since although Black has the two bishops, White has an outpost for his knight on d5 and open lines for his rooks on the queenside. Objectively, White must be better. But the bishop on d4 has no counterpart, and as long as White's bishop on f1 can't be freed (by f4, for example), Black's minor pieces can create problems. How long his pressure can last is illustrated by the game continuation, which I will give without notes. Although White surely could have played better, Black's play makes a powerful aesthetic impression:

27 ♖c3 ♕e5 28 ♖d5 ♖g7 29 ♖b1 ♖d6 30 ♖b3 ♖d7 31 ♖eb1 ♖a6 32 ♖b6 ♖c6 33 h3 h5 34 ♖d5!? ♖a4 35 ♖b6 ♖e8 36 ♖c2 ♖a3 37 ♖6b3 ♖a4! 38 ♖b6 ♖a2 39 ♖xa4 ♖xc2 40 ♖b6 ♖e6 41 ♖d5 g5!

Amazingly, Black is probably equal now.

42 ♖xb7 ♖xh3 43 gxf3 ♖xf3 44 ♖g2 ♖h4 45 ♖f1 ♖xg2 46 ♖xf7+ ♖h6 47 ♖b1 g4 48 ♖f4 ♖a2 49 ♖b6+ ♖g5 50 ♖e6+ ♖g6 51 ♖d8+ ♖g5 52 ♖e6+ ♖g6 ½-½

In certain tactical respects, Kasparov could be considered a spiritual successor to Tal, but his sacrifices tend to be more sound. The next game illustrates this, in that Black's exchange sacrifice looks as crazy as the one by Tal, but seems to be objectively correct.

Beliaevsky – Kasparov

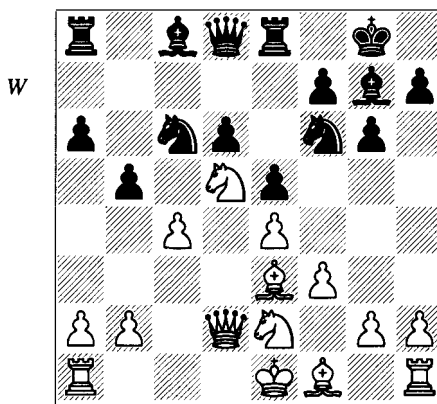
Moscow 1981

1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♖c3 ♖g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 ♖e3 ♖c6 7 ♖d2 a6 8 ♖ge2 ♖e8 9 ♖c1 e5 10 d5 ♖d4 11 ♖le2 c5!? 12 dxc6 ♖xc6 13 ♖d5 b5!! (D)

This is truly amazing. After Black gives up the exchange, he will still be left with a weak pawn on d6, a gaping hole on d5, and a bad bishop on g7! And yet, concrete dynamic factors seem to give Black just enough counterplay, however White continues.

14 ♖b6 ♖d7 15 ♖c7 ♖b8 16 ♖xe8 ♖xe8 17 ♖e3

A big decision, allowing Black to win a pawn and gain play in the centre and along the b-file. Kasparov's analysis of the alternatives is a good survey of the opportunistic nature of



Black's position, based on the strength of the d4-square and his lead in development:

a) 17 ♖c7 ♖b7 18 ♖xd6 bxc4 (threatening ...♖d7) 19 ♖a3 ♖e6 20 ♖c3 ♖d7 21 ♖f2 ♖h6 22 ♖d1 ♖d4 with compensation.

b) 17 c5 ♖b7! 18 ♖xd6 ♖e6 19 ♖c3 ♖f8 20 ♖d2 ♖d7 21 ♖f2 b4 with compensation.

c) 17 cxb5 axb5 (17...♖xb6!? 18 bxc6 d5! 19 exd5 e4, but I think 17...axb5 is better) 18 ♖e3 d5 19 exd5 ♖d4 20 ♖c3 b4 21 ♖e4 ♖xd5 with compensation.

17...bxc4 18 ♖c3 ♖e6 19 ♖e2

An amazing line is Kasparov's 19 ♖d5 ♖xd5! 20 exd5 e4 21 dxe6 ♖xe6, which he describes as 'unclear'! In fact, White has terrific difficulties defending in that case.

19...♖d4 20 0-0 d5 21 exd5 ♖xd5 22 ♖xd5 ♖xd5

Kasparov assesses the position as already better for Black. The knight on d4 is a real thorn in White's side, but can't be exchanged without unleashing the power of Black's bishops. In what follows, Black very casually builds up his attack.

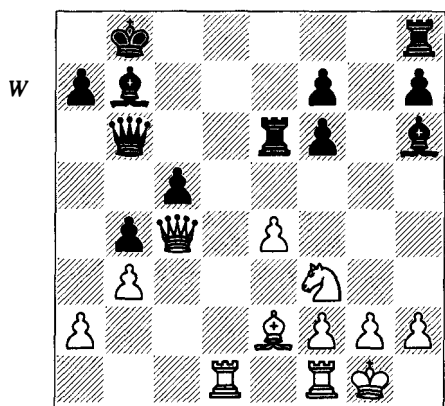
23 ♖f2 h5! 24 ♖c1 ♖e6 25 ♖f1 h4 26 ♖e1 ♖c6 27 ♖h6 ♖h8 28 f4? e4

Simply winning for Black, according to Kasparov. This is where the human eye still outperforms the materialistic computer processor. The game finished:

29 ♖d1 ♖e6 30 f5 ♖xf5 31 ♖f4 ♖e8 32 ♖fd2 ♖c5+ 33 ♖h1 ♖e5 34 ♖g5 ♖h7 35 ♖d8 ♖xd8 36 ♖xd8 ♖f2 37 ♖d1 ♖xh6 38 ♖xe5 e3 39 ♖c3 h3 40 ♖e1 ♖g4 0-1

A nice finish is 41 ♖c1 ♖d5 42 ♖xf2 exf2 and there is nothing to be done about ...♖e3 and ...hgx2+.

As one might imagine, Karpov's exchange sacrifices (which are quite frequent) emphasize long-term positional pressure:



Karpov – Gelfand

Linares 1993

Most players would play the 'forced' 20 ♙d3 without thinking, and worry about how to build up later. Karpov felt that Black would have good chances after 20... ♜g8 in that case, threatening ...f5. Instead, he found:

20 ♜d5!

As so often with Karpov, this is a prophylactic idea to restrict Black's play.

20... ♜he8

Temporarily, Black resists the exchange offer. After 20... ♙xd5 21 exd5 ♜e7 22 ♜d1 , Karpov assesses the position as clearly favourable to White. McDonald lists the following factors to support this assessment:

- a) all the squares along the e-file are covered, so Black's rooks lack effectiveness;
- b) the opposite-coloured bishops actually favour White's attack, and from d3, White's bishop can hit h7 or go to f5;
- c) White has a strong passed pawn in the centre; and
- d) Black's king is exposed.

To this, I might add that White may be able to bring a knight via h4 to f5, from where it will dominate the board.

21 ♙d3 ♜d8! 22 ♜d1 ♜ed6 23 ♙e2 ♙xd5

White was threatening exchanges and capture on f7, and 23... ♜xd5 24 exd5 ♜d6 25 ♜c2 also obviously favours him.

24 exd5 ♜b7 25 ♜h4! ♙f8 26 ♙c4 ♜xd5

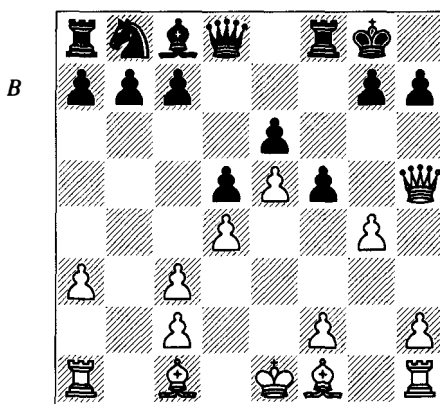
A counter-sacrifice, since 26...h6 27 ♜e4 ♜d7 28 ♜d3 prepares the aforementioned ♙h4-f5 . But Black is left with quite a few weaknesses.

27 ♙xd5 ♜xd5 28 ♜e1 ♜d8 29 ♜xf6! ♜c7 30 g3 ♙d6 31 ♙g5 ♜d7 32 ♜e8+

Now the difference between the airy black king position and the solid white one becomes decisive. The rest is really just technique.

32... ♜b7 33 ♙e4 ♙e7 34 ♜f5 ♜c6 35 ♙g2 ♜c7 36 ♜h8 ♜g6 37 ♜d5+ ♜c6 38 ♜xc6+ ♙xc6 39 ♜xh7 ♙d5 40 ♙d2 ♙f6 41 ♙c4 ♙d4 42 ♜h6 ♜c6 43 g4 ♜e6 44 h4 ♙d5 45 g5 1-0

Sticking in the realm of positional sacrifices, the modern player is increasingly aware of opportunities to establish a single minor piece which is more effective than a rook. Here is a clever example:



Martin Gonzalez – Dolmatov

Barcelona 1983

White is threatening 11 ♙d3 and 12 gxf5 . Black's solution is remarkable, in that he foregoes natural moves in order to give up material for the foreseeable future:

10... ♙d7!! 11 gxf5

White's attack is completely frustrated after 11 ♙d3 ♙e8 12 ♜h3 ♙g6 .

11... ♜xf5 12 ♜h3 ♙e8 13 ♙d3 ♙g6!

The whole point. A bishop on f5 will be worth more than a rook! Although it would be a strong piece in any case, its enormous strength here also derives from the weakness of White's doubled c-pawns. Because of them, White will not be able to free his game, and at the same

time, Black's knight has outpost squares like c4 and a4 to play with.

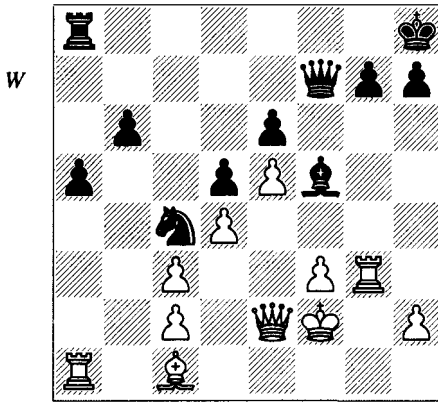
14 ♖g1 ♜f8 15 ♙xf5 ♙xf5 16 ♜f3 ♚c6!

Both preventing White's c4 and eventually, heading for the c4-square via a5. He also allows the exchange of queens by 17 ♙h6 ♙g6 18 ♜xf8+ ♜xf8, but then after White's bishop retreats, Black wins the c2-pawn and his bishop, knight, and rook on an open file will dominate the play, particularly with White's weak pawns.

17 ♜e2 ♙h8 18 a4 ♜f7!

As Dvoretzky points out, this prepares ...♙a5, the immediate 18...♙a5 allowing 19 ♜b5! b6 20 ♜d7.

19 a5 b6 20 axb6 cxb6 21 ♖g3 ♙a5 22 f3 ♚c4 23 ♙f2 a5 (D)



White has got rid of his weak a-pawn, but in return, Black has a dominating knight on c4 and passed a-pawn of his own. White has absolutely nothing to do as Black improves his position.

24 ♙g1 a4 25 ♙a3 ♙g6 26 ♙f2 ♜f5

Opposite-colour bishops favour the attacker. Black ties down White's pieces until he finally is able to break through on the queenside.

27 ♙a2 ♙a7 28 ♙c1 h6 29 ♙g1 a3 30 ♖g2 ♙h5 31 ♖g3 ♜f8 32 ♙h3 ♙g6 33 ♖g3 ♙f5 34 ♜g2 b5 35 ♜f2 b4!?

A good practical move, although perhaps it should be prepared for a few moves, since White could have defended better in what follows.

36 ♜e1! ♙xc2! 37 cxb4

Not 37 ♙xc2? b3, and the pawns triumph.

37...♙b1 38 ♙a1?

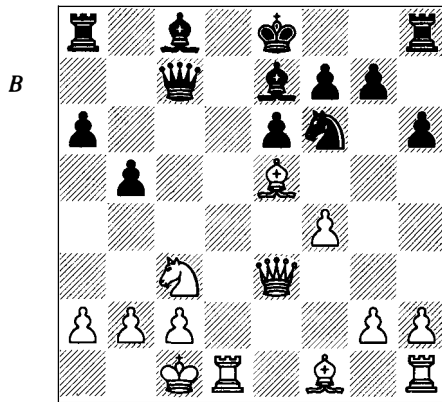
Dvoretzky points out that White should try 38 ♙xa3! ♙xa3 39 ♙xa3 ♙d3! 40 ♜c3 ♙c4,

when "White's position is difficult". Now, however, Black wins.

38...a2 39 f4 ♜e8 40 ♜e2 ♜a4 41 ♜e1 ♙b7 42 ♙d2 ♙xd2 43 ♜xd2 ♙xb4 44 ♙d3 ♙xd3 45 ♜xd3 ♙b3 0-1

Since 46 ♜d1 loses to 46...♜b4. At no time in this game was either white rook the equal of Black's light-squared bishop.

So many modern exchange sacrifices involve getting two bishops and an attack that such a procedure seems almost trivial. The next game is typical in this regard, but has an extra twist.



Ivanchuk – Kramnik
Dos Hermanas 1996

Where should Black's queen go?

14...♙g4!

Nowhere! Now 15 ♙xc7 ♙xe3 is not attractive, so Ivanchuk grabs the exchange:

15 ♜f3 ♙xe5 16 ♜xa8 ♙d7

Not 16...♙c6? 17 ♙xb5!. After 16...♙d7, White's next move is cleverly calculated, but 17 ♜f3 ♙b7 18 ♜g3 was probably correct. Then Nunn gives Black 'reasonable' long-term attacking chances by a combination of ...♙f6 and ...b4.

17 g3?! ♙b6 18 ♜f3 ♙b7 19 ♙e4 f5!

A far-reaching idea. Clearly Ivanchuk had worked out this sequence, and correctly felt that he could now give back the exchange and retain the superior game, based on Black's king in the centre. But Kramnik has a surprise in store.

20 ♜h5+ ♙f8 21 ♙f2 ♙f6!

Remarkable! Again, Black sees that his minor piece (in this case the bishop on b7) is worth more than a rook, and rejects 21...♙xh1 22 ♜xh1. What is different here from the standard exchange sacrifice is that his remaining rook is completely out of the game! Also, it took courage to resist the probable forced draw after 21...♙c5 22 ♜h3 ♙xh1 23 ♜g5 hxg5 24 ♜xh8+ ♜f7 25 ♜h5+ with perpetual check.

22 ♙d3 ♜a4 23 ♜he1!

With a counterattack. 23 b3 ♙b2+ 24 ♜b1 ♙a3 is too strong.

23...♙xb2+ 24 ♜b1 ♙d5!

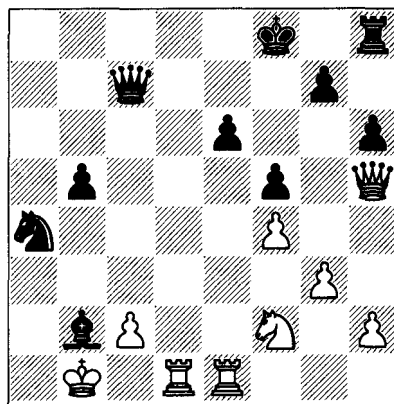
Defending e6 and threatening the king, as the line 25 ♙xf5? ♙xa2+! 26 ♜xa2 ♜c4+ 27 ♜b1 ♜c3+ 28 ♜xb2 ♜b4+ 29 ♜c1 ♜a2# demonstrates. The following tactical sequence is White's best try.

25 ♙xb5! ♙xa2+ 26 ♜xa2 axb5 27 ♜b1! (D)

27...♜a5!?

This leads to a win, so it is difficult to criticize. Nevertheless, Kramnik gives a lengthy analysis which shows that 27...♜e7! is more decisive (covering the second rank). After 27...♜a5, White would lose after 28 ♜d7 ♜xe1+ 29 ♜d1 ♜g8! 30 ♜g6 ♙f6; but he should play 28 c3!, although Black maintains a big edge after 28...♜xc3+! 29 ♜xb2 ♜a4+ 30

B



♜a2 ♜b4! (Kramnik). Ivanchuk now falters under the pressure and loses quickly:

28 ♜d3? ♙a3! 29 ♜a2 ♜c3+ 30 ♜b3 ♜d5 31 ♜a2

What else? 31 ♜xe6 loses to 31...♜a4+ 32 ♜a2 ♜c3+ 33 ♜a1 ♙c1#.

31...♙b4+ 32 ♜b1 ♙c3 0-1

Black never used his rook!

This concludes our presentation of the modern exchange sacrifice. Other examples of this weapon are strewn throughout this book, and the reader may also want to relate our discussion here to the topic of modern dynamism in Chapter 10.

9 Prophylaxis

This chapter may remind the reader of Part 1, in that I will treat the concept of prophylaxis in two stages: as Nimzowitsch first explicated it, and as it is interpreted in modern chess. We shall see that prophylaxis is explained differently by various writers, but it is safe to say that its modern application is more broadly applied than in Nimzowitsch's writings. This is an area of chess theory that is just beginning to receive serious attention.

Nimzowitsch's Notion

What do we mean by 'prophylaxis' in chess? Nimzowitsch spoke of the whole of positional play as "an energetic and systematic application of prophylactic measures. What is important above all else is to blunt the edge of certain possibilities which in a positional sense would be undesirable." As for the word 'prophylaxis' itself, Silman defines it as "A strategy explored by Nimzowitsch. Taken from the Greek word *prophylaktikos*, meaning to guard or prevent beforehand ... [a prophylactic move] stops the opponent from taking action in a certain area for fear of some kind of reprisal."

These are rather all-encompassing definitions which are indeed close to the modern use of the term. Tisdall is of the opinion that Nimzowitsch himself originally used the term more narrowly, "mainly expressed through his idea of over-protection, where the focus of the pieces is directed towards key points...". Nimzowitsch did originally limit the application of his concept, but not to overprotection alone. In *My System*, he states categorically that the undesirable possibilities which need to be prevented are "of two kinds only":

"One of these is the possibility of the opponent making a 'freeing' pawn move ... the prevention of freeing pawn moves (as far as this appears necessary and feasible) is of great importance in positional play. Such prevention is ... an exterior prophylactic. It is much more difficult to grasp the idea of interior prophylactic..."

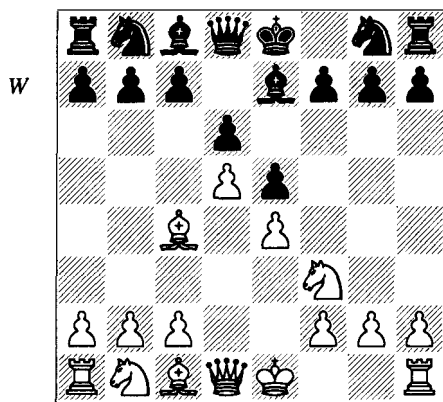
He goes on to define the 'interior prophylactic' as the exercise of overprotection of one's own strategically important points, "by providing defence in excess of attack to lay up a reserve of defence ... weak points, still more, strong points, in short everything that we can include in the conception of strategically important points, should be overprotected. If the pieces are so engaged, they get their reward in the fact that they will find themselves well-posted in every respect." [*My System*]

So there are two quite distinct notions in Nimzowitsch's original argument: (a) prevention of the opponent's freeing moves; and (b) overprotection of one's own key points. But the prevention of the opponent's plans in general, or even of dangerous non-freeing moves, is not mentioned; and that is the additional sense in which we use the term today.

To some extent, Nimzowitsch himself created this confusion. In *Chess Praxis* (where the concept of prophylaxis plays a bigger role than in *My System*), he begins to use 'prophylaxis' to include cases of preventing a particularly aggressive plan by the opponent. If we look up the references to prophylaxis indexed at the back of *Praxis*, they show an interesting distribution. More than half of the examples are cases of stopping a freeing pawn move by the opponent. This is normally done by a rook move (often the so-called 'mysterious rook move' described below), and occasionally by some other piece. But a minority of cases in *Praxis* refer to preventing an attacking idea or even to such things as 'prophylactically' eliminating the opponent's two bishops, ideas not included in his original definition above. And overprotection, which now appears in only a handful of games, is not even coupled with the word 'prophylaxis' in Nimzowitsch's new exposition.

Enough of definitions. Let's look at a few typical examples from Nimzowitsch himself (D):

The following diagram is an example of prevention of the freeing move. This is an uncontroversial case, but does illustrate the priority of



prophylaxis over development in certain situations. Instead of getting another piece out, White retreats an already-developed piece:

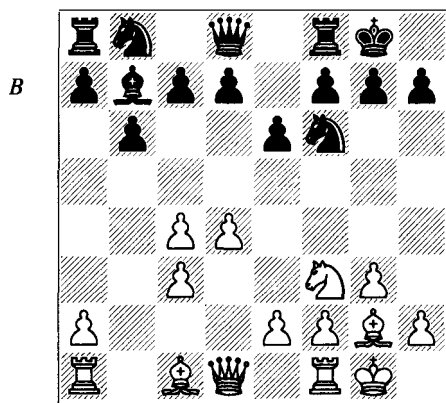
6 ♖d3!

This is primarily directed against the freeing move ...f5, but to some extent also against ...c6, since that can now be answered by c4. Nimzowitsch continues his analysis with...

6... ♟f6 7 c4 0-0 8 ♟c3 ♟e8 9 ♜e2

...and White is fully prepared to meet Black's most natural freeing move 9...f5 by 10 exf5 ♙xf5 11 ♙xf5 ♜xf5 12 ♟e4 with the better bishop and unassailable e4-square for his knights.

'The mysterious rook move' was one of Nimzowitsch's favourite devices, bringing a rook to a closed file in order to prophylactically discourage a freeing move by the opponent. It occurs often in Nimzowitsch's own games, usually in the opening, for example:



Bogoljubow – Nimzowitsch

Karlsbad 1929

Natural moves for Black might include 8...d6 or 8...♙e4. But in a highly original and modern way, Nimzowitsch finds a prophylactic solution:

8... ♜e8! 9 ♜e1

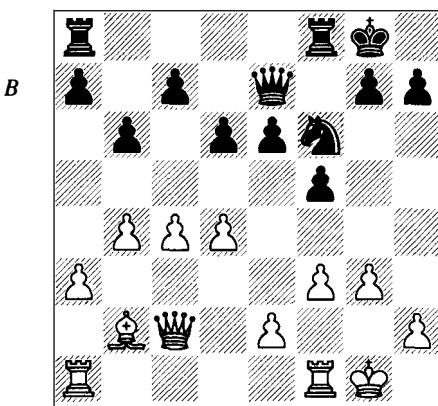
Nimzowitsch says: "Black operates here and in the following play with prophylaxis...", pointing out that Black has discouraged White's 'best' idea 9 ♟d2 in view of 9...♙xg2 10 ♜xg2 e5!, when 11 e4 fails to 11...exd4 12 cxd4 ♟xe4.

9...d6 10 ♜c2?!

This loses time. Nimzowitsch likes 10 ♟d2 ♙xg2 11 ♜xg2 e5 12 e4 ♟c6 13 ♙b2 for White; but of course the bishop on b2 is awful, so it's hard to believe that White would stand better in that case.

10... ♙e4 11 ♜b3 ♟c6 12 ♙f1 e5 13 dxe5 ♟xe5 14 ♟xe5 ♜xe5 15 ♙f4 ♜e8 16 f3 ♙b7 17 ♜ad1 ♟d7

Now Nimzowitsch correctly notes that White's position suffers from a 'profound, inner decay', and that after the inevitable e4, Black will eventually be able to get the advantage by ...f5. That indeed happened in the game, which Black went on to win.



Przepiorka – Nimzowitsch

Kecskemet 1927

Black sees e4 as White's only serious idea, and takes rather extreme measures to prevent it:

17... ♜f7!? 18 ♜ac1 ♜af8

Now **this** is prophylaxis! Black bunches up his rooks awkwardly, just to prevent e4. But it's not clear that White isn't slightly better in any

case. An interesting move now is 19 b5, for example, thinking about a4 and either a5 or ♖a3 and c5.

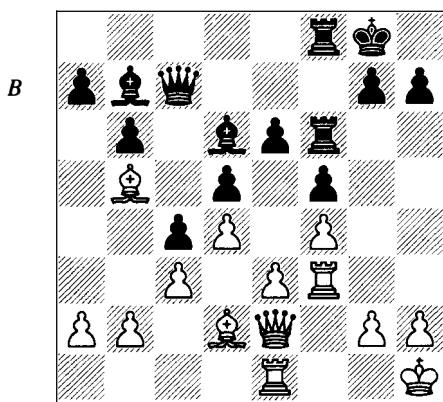
19 ♖d3 h5!? 20 e4?

Nimzowitsch rightly criticizes this, suggesting 20 e3 h4 21 ♖g2 ♘h5 with Black better. Actually, I think that 20 ♖d2! makes more sense than either of those moves, intending 20...h4 21 ♖g5!. Then 20...♘d7 is unclear, in some cases intending ...g5 with an attack.

After 20 e4?, Black's prophylaxis was justified:

20...fxe4 21 fxe4 ♘g4 22 h3? ♘f2 23 ♖e2 ♘xh3+ 24 ♖h1 ♖g5 25 ♖xf7 ♖xf7 26 ♖g2 ♘f2+ 27 ♖g1 ♖e3 0-1

One of Nimzowitsch's favourite examples was the following game:



Kupchik – Capablanca
Lake Hopatcong 1926

It's hard not to like Black here, who has prospects of ...a6, ...b5-b4 and opening lines on the queenside. Surely that's not a bad plan right away? But Capablanca sees more deeply. He perceives that White's only counterplay against this plan consists of some break with g4, in order to activate rooks on the g-file and a bishop on c2. Thus, instead of going forward with his attack, he takes the opportunity to squelch all possible play by his opponent:

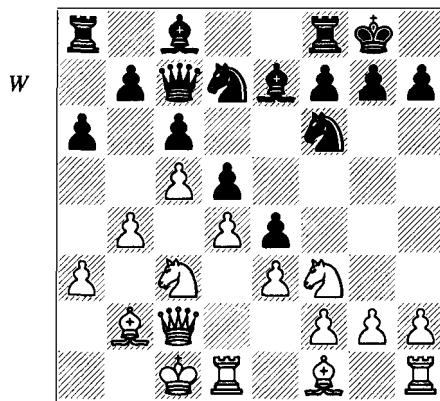
19...h5! 20 ♖ef1 ♖h6!

Given '!!' by Nimzowitsch, who comments: "the 'mysterious' rook move, for Black sees White's h3 and g4 coming, and he wants to be ready to attack on the h-file when this happens."

Once White's kingside play fails, the game ends quickly:

21 ♖e1 g6 22 ♖h4 ♖f7! 23 ♖e1 a6 24 ♖a4 b5 25 ♖d1 ♖c6 26 ♖h3 a5 27 ♖g5 ♖hh8 28 ♖h4 b4 29 ♖e1 ♖b8 30 ♖hf3 a4 31 ♖f2 a3 32 b3 cxb3 33 ♖xb3 ♖b5 34 ♖g1 ♖xc3 0-1

Finally, an example that looks thoroughly modern:



Nimzowitsch – J. Bernstein
Karlsbad 1923

White, by playing an early b4, allowed Black a break by ...e5, which would normally equalize. Now, having played ...e4, Black is naturally intending to play for a long-term attack by ...f5-f4. Against this 'subjective majority', Nimzowitsch finds an excellent prophylactic idea:

12 ♘h4!

First, he threatens ♘f5.

12...♘b8 13 g3 ♘e8 14 ♘g2 f5 15 h4!

In *Blockade*, Nimzowitsch comments: "And Black's kingside, which was seemingly ready to march, is paralysed." Black can't even play the excruciatingly slow ...g6, ...h6 and ...g5 without allowing something undesirable, e.g., 15...g6 (15...h6 16 h5) 16 a4 h6 17 ♘f4! ♖g7 18 h5 g5 19 ♘g6, etc. So in the game, White gets a free hand on the queenside. Although the prophylactic part is over, the game's course is both entertaining and instructive. For one thing, White's ability to advance pawns in front of his own king (due to his space advantage) harks back to Chapter 2 of this Part.

15...♖d8 16 a4 b6 17 b5! ♘f6 18 ♘f4 axb5 19 axb5 ♖f7 20 ♖e2 ♖c7 21 cxb6 ♖xf4 22

gxf4 ♖d7 23 ♜d2 cxb5 24 ♖a1 ♜c6 25 ♙xb5
 ♜a5 26 ♙e2 ♜fb8 27 ♜a4 ♙xa4 28 ♜xa4
 ♜xb6 29 ♙c3 ♜b3+ 30 ♜xb3 ♜xb3 31 ♜xa8+
 ♜e8 32 ♙d1 ♜xc3 33 ♜xc3 ♜c7+ 34 ♜d2
 ♜f7 35 ♙h5+ g6 36 ♜ha1 ♜b6 37 ♙e2 ♜g7
 38 ♜e1 ♜c7 39 ♜a5 ♜h6 40 ♜f1 ♜b3 41 h5
 ♜e8 42 ♜a6 ♜b2 43 hxc6 hxc6 44 ♜6a2 ♜b7
 45 ♜a7 ♜b2 46 ♜g2 ♜f6 47 ♜h1+ ♜h5 48
 ♙xh5 gxh5 49 ♜ha1 1-0

Modern Prophylaxis: Pervasive Prevention

For some time, Nimzowitsch's notion did not attract much attention. For one thing, people associated it with overprotection itself. Unfortunately, overprotection has always been a rather vague idea, and only seems applicable to a narrow set of circumstances (certain positions with pawn chains or isolated central pawns). I think that if you asked top players, even today, if they felt that the idea of overprotection was an important positional concept, you might very well get a near-unanimous 'no'. But if you asked them about prophylaxis, the response would be much more positive. Pachman expresses the trend towards prophylactic defence as follows: "Just as in modern medicine, there is more and more emphasis on prophylactic measures to prevent rather than have to cure certain illnesses, we see in modern chess strategy many preventive moves played to anticipate an enemy attack well before it has even started. This consists in strengthening the defence of any weak points which the enemy could attack, thus eliminating in advance the possibility of tactical threats which might occur later."

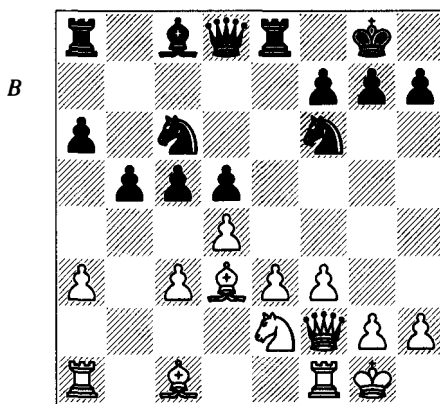
The following diagram is an example of prophylaxis in the early modern era (D):

A fairly standard position from the Nimzo-Indian. White has followed the usual plan (made famous by Botvinnik) of preparation for e4. At this point, he threatens e4, since after multiple captures on that square, Black's f7 hangs.

13...♙e6!

This move is prophylactic. Now 14 e4 loses a pawn to 14...dxe4 15 fxe4 cxd4 16 cxd4 ♜g4 17 ♜g3 ♜xd4. So White prevents ...♜g4.

14 h3 ♜a7!



Lilienthal – Ragozin
Moscow 1935

And Black reinforces f7! This time his point is 15 e4 dxe4 16 fxe4 cxd4 17 cxd4 ♙c4! 18 ♙xc4 bxc4 19 e5 ♜d5 with a firm blockade and intent to play ...f6. So White gives up on e4 for the moment and begins action on the queenside.

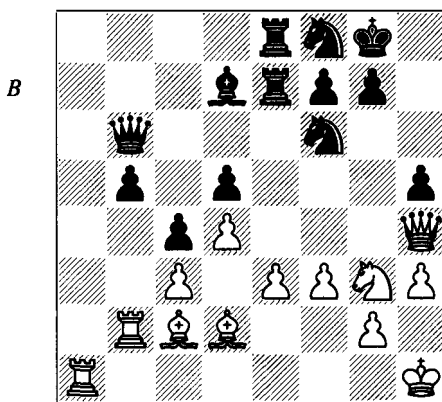
15 ♙d2 ♜b6 16 ♜fb1 ♜ae7 17 a4 c4 18 ♙c2 ♙c8 19 ♜g3 h5!

More prophylaxis. Now e4 will be unplayable for some time due to a timely ...h4, winning the e-pawn.

20 ♜e2 ♜d8 21 ♜a2 ♙d7 22 axb5 axb5 23 ♜ba1 ♙c8 24 ♜b2 ♙d7 25 ♜h4 ♜e6 26 ♜h1

Once again, 26 e4 fails, due to 26...dxe4 27 fxe4 ♜f8! 28 ♜g3 ♜g6 29 ♜g5 h4 30 ♜h5 ♜xe4.

26...♜f8 27 ♜g3 (D)



White is finally ready for e4. But Black finds a remarkable continuation along the lines of the last chapter:

27...♖xe3! 28 ♖xe3 ♖xe3 29 ♜xh5 ♜xh5
30 ♜xh5 ♖c6

Black doesn't even have a pawn for the exchange, and after White's next move, it appears that Black will not be able to play 31...♖xc3 due to 32 ♜d2. But he does so anyway:

31 ♜g5 ♖xc3! 32 ♜d2 ♖xc2 33 ♖xc2 ♜e6

Now Black has only a pawn for two exchanges, but his passed pawns on the queenside are monstrous, and the white d-pawn requires care. This position is terribly difficult for White, at best.

34 ♜d1 b4 35 ♖b2 b3 36 ♜c3 ♜c7! 37 ♖e2 ♜a7 38 ♜b4 ♜b5 39 ♖e7 ♜a3 40 ♜e1 c3 41 ♖e8+ ♖xe8 42 ♖xe8+ ♜h7 43 ♜xf7 ♜a8 44 ♖e1 ♜d6 45 ♜c7 c2 46 ♜xd6?

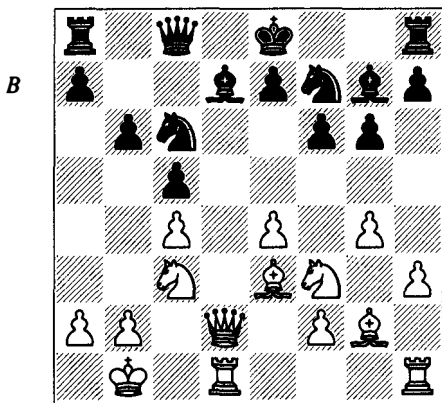
Maybe White could still try 46 ♜h2!?, for example, 46...♜c8 47 ♜xd6 b2 48 ♖e5 c1 ♜49 ♖h5+ ♜h6 50 ♖xh6+ gxf6 51 ♜b6 ♜c2 52 ♜b7+ ♜g6 53 ♜d7! and it's up to Black to find a way out of the draw.

46...b2 47 ♜f4 ♜c6 0-1

Petrosian's name is associated with the modern idea of prophylaxis. Here is a simple example Soltis points out:

Pomar – Petrosian Siegren Olympiad 1970

1 d4 g6 2 c4 ♖g7 3 ♜c3 d6 4 ♜f3 ♖g4 5 g3 ♜c8!? 6 ♖g2 ♜h6!? 7 h3 ♖d7 8 e4 f6 9 ♖e3 ♜f7 10 ♜d2 c5 11 dxc5 dxc5 12 0-0-0 ♜c6 13 ♜b1 b6 14 g4 (D)



The opening is fairly typical of Petrosian, in that he has been deliberately provocative. Even

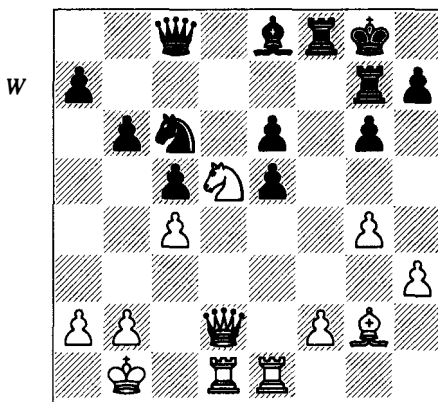
by modern standards, his set-up looks a bit bizarre. It seems that you could give Black several moves and he wouldn't know what to do with them. But Petrosian is unfazed:

14...♖b8! 15 ♖he1 ♖b7!

There is an irony here, placing a rook *vis-à-vis* White's g2-bishop. But Black's last two moves are the essence of prophylaxis. As Soltis comments: "Look around for an immediate threat to Black's second rank and you won't find it. But Black is thinking about the near future." This use of the second-rank for defensive purposes has been mentioned elsewhere in this book and it also occurred in the last example. Here the rook not only defends d7, but is ready to swing into the centre or to the kingside when appropriate.

White now jumps at the chance to activate his pieces at the mere cost of giving his opponent an extra pawn which is isolated and doubled. But due to the prophylactic nature of Black's position, this also activates Black's pieces, and in particular that rook.

16 e5?! fxe5 17 ♜g5 0-0 18 ♜d5 ♜xg5 19 ♖xg5 ♖e8! 20 ♖h6 e6 21 ♖xg7 ♖xg7 (D)



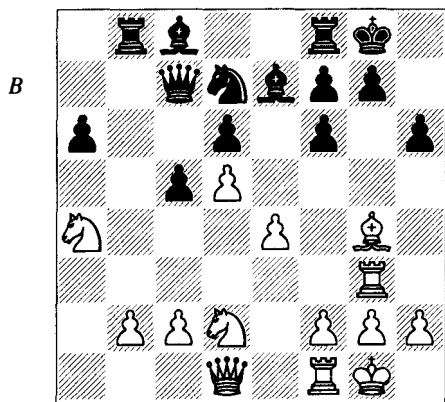
Black's last three moves prepared this!
22 ♜c3 ♜d4 23 ♖xe5 ♖gf7

Black is winning; the f-file pressure is too strong.

24 ♜e4? ♜c7 25 ♖g5 ♖f4! 26 ♜d3 h6 27 ♜d6 hxg5 28 ♖xe8 ♖xe8 29 ♜xg6+ ♜f8 30 ♜xg5 ♜h7+ 0-1

Here's one more brief example of Petrosian's play, which could be considered just 'defence' as well as prophylaxis, but at any rate

shows graphically how effective his trenchant approach could be:



Terpuhov – Petrosian
Moscow 1951

White has just played 15 ♖g3, obviously intending to attack on the kingside. This may not look very dangerous, but just look to what extremes Petrosian goes to counter this, and then how quickly White's position collapses once the attack is beaten back:

15...♗h8! 16 ♖f5 ♗d8! 17 ♗g4 ♖g8 18 ♗h5 ♗e8! 19 b3 ♖f8

The best plans often look like ones which rank beginners would play!

20 ♗e2 g6 21 ♖h3 f5 22 f4 ♗f6 23 ♖e1 fxe4 24 ♖xc8 ♗xc8 25 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 26 ♗xe4 ♖g7 27 ♖d3 ♖b4!

What a transformation! Black has all the activity.

28 ♗f3 c4 29 ♖d2 cxb3 30 cxb3 ♗f5 31 g3 g5! 32 ♗d3 ♗xd3 33 ♖xd3 gxf4 34 ♖e7 fxe3 35 hxe3 ♖gb8! 36 ♖xf7 ♖xb3 37 ♖xb3 ♖xb3 38 ♖g2 ♖b4 39 ♖f4 ♖d4! 0-1

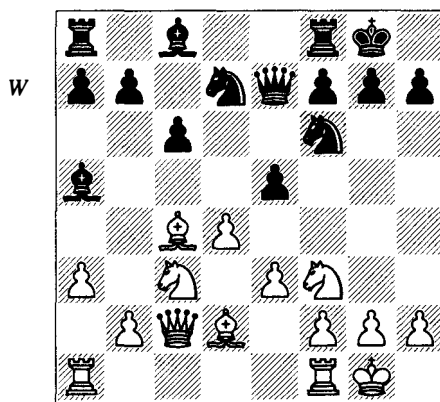
These are examples of *defensive* prophylaxis, in which the side which is at least optically worse anticipates and frustrates his opponent's plans. Today, thanks in large part to the games of Karpov and the influence they have had, 'prophylaxis' may refer to the process of frustrating the possibilities of the opponent, even if one has the better position to begin with.

The Russian 'super-trainer' Dvoretsky and his GM pupils have written brilliantly about this aspect of modern chess, and reference to it

appears increasingly in the notes of strong players. Indeed, much of the new awareness about prophylaxis can be traced to Dvoretsky's insightful and diligent work on this concept. I would also suggest that in the natural course of the evolution of opening theory, more energy than ever is being devoted to frustrating the opponent's plans. To use the word 'prophylaxis' for this tendency may be an unjustified extension of Nimzowitsch's notion; but whatever we call it, this is a trend worth noting. Dvoretsky provides the following example:

Botvinnik – Euwe
World Ch match-tournament,
The Hague/Moscow 1948

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♗f3 ♗f6 4 ♗c3 c6 5 e3 ♗bd7 6 ♖d3 ♖b4 7 a3 ♖a5 8 ♗c2 ♗e7 9 ♖d2 dxc4 10 ♖xc4 e5 11 0-0 0-0 (D)



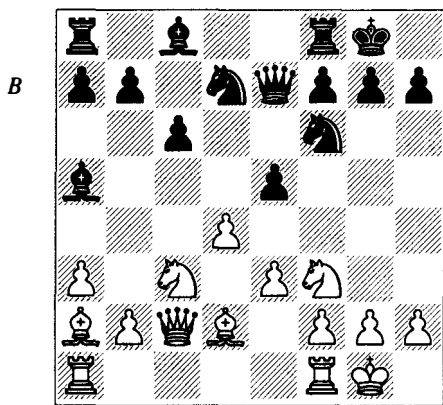
A rather normal-looking position, except possibly for the bishop on a5. In fact, White's 9 ♖d2 might already be considered 'prophylactic', in that it is hardly very active, but prevents ...e4 for some time due to ♗xe4. At any rate, in this type of position, familiar from various Semi-Slav lines, one might consider a number of candidate moves. Those moves include 12 e4 (which is premature here), 12 dxe5 (freeing Black's game), 12 d5, 12 ♖ae1, 12 ♖a2 and 12 h3. In the last two decades, the move h3 has become a common prophylactic idea, and this seems quite a good choice, intending 12 h3 ♖c7 13 ♖a2. Keres and Dvoretsky, on the other hand, convincingly argue that the best move is in fact:

12 ♖a2!

This has a number of advantages outlined in the next paragraph. But two of the world's greatest players in 1948 chose neither 12 ♖a2 nor 12 h3 here! For example, Reshevsky (versus Euwe in the same tournament) played 12 d5?!, after which Keres points out three ways for Black to equalize: 12...♗c7 (! – easiest, in my opinion), 12...♗xc3 13 ♗xc3 cxd5 14 ♖b4 ♘c5 15 ♗xd5 ♘xd5 16 ♗xc5 ♗c7 (perhaps still a bit better for White after 17 ♖ac1), and 12...♘b6 13 ♖a2 ♗xc3 14 ♗xc3 ♘bxd5 15 ♗xe5 ♗g4.

OK, but even the great Botvinnik chose 12 ♖ae1?! ♗c7 13 ♘e4 (13 h3!? – Dvoretzky; this looks better) 13...♘xe4 14 ♗xe4, when instead of Euwe's 14...a5?!, both 14...♗d6 and 14...♘f6 15 ♗h4 e4 16 ♘e5 ♗e6 are equal (Dvoretzky).

So why 12 ♖a2? Because it prevents all of Black's ideas! For one thing, Black can no longer play ...♘b6 with tempo, and thus get his c8-bishop out. After 12 ♖a2 (D), look at Black's possibilities:



a) 12...e4? loses to 13 ♘xe4.

b) 12...exd4?! 13 exd4, which tends to be disastrous for Black in any case due to ♖fe1 and ♘e5 or ♘g5, is even worse when Black can't disentangle by ...♘b6 with tempo (and the a2-bishop can even go to b1 with mate threats in some cases).

c) To prepare ...e4, Black might consider 12...h6?, but then 13 ♘h4! threatens ♘g6 or ♘f5 with devastating effect.

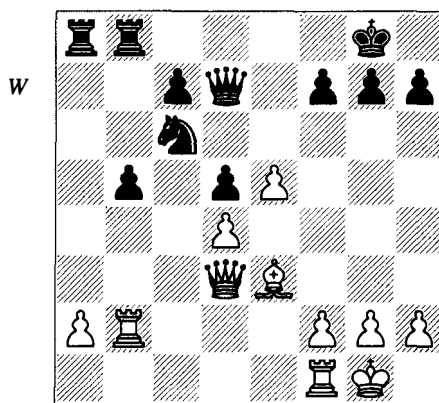
d) 12...♗xc3, is depressing at best after 13 ♗xc3 e4 14 ♘e5 (threatening ♗b4), according to Dvoretzky. From this point, I have analysed 14...a5 15 f3! (or 15 f4) 15...exf3 16 ♖xf3 ♘xe5

17 dxe5 ♘d5 18 ♗d4 intending ♗c5 and e4, e.g., 18...♗g4 19 ♖g3 ♗h4 20 ♗c5 ♖fe8 21 ♗c4! h5 22 e4 b5 23 ♗f1 and White wins.

e) 12...♗b6 might seem reasonable, but then Black can hardly move, so 13 ♖ae1 (among others) is strong; given time (which he has!), White can either play ♘h4-f5 or go for the double exchange in the centre followed by advance of his pawns by f4 and e4.

f) In view of the above, Black should probably try 12...♗c7, when another advantage of ♖a2 is revealed: 13 ♘b5!? ♗b6! (13...♗b8 14 ♗b4) 14 ♗b4 c5 'with a slightly inferior position' (Dvoretzky). That is comfortable for White after 15 dxc5, but he also could play 13 h3 (a prophylactic move, stopping 13...e4 14 ♘g5 ♗xh2+), and challenge Black to prove what he is up to. In that case, I very much like White's position.

Karpov is the player we most associate with modern prophylaxis; one feels that he would have played 12 ♖a2! in the position above (or at least 12 h3, which he has played in similar positions). As Nunn points out, he tends to eliminate the opponent's possibilities in order to pursue his own plans undisturbed, a style Nunn contrasts with the purely defensive prophylaxis of Petrosian. We have already seen a wonderful and aggressive prophylactic effort by Karpov in his game against Hort in Part 1, Chapter 7. Here is another example:



Karpov – Yusupov

USSR Ch, Moscow 1983

This is a game Yusupov himself uses to discuss Karpov as a 'prophylactic chess-player'.

White could now launch an attack with f4; but Karpov likes to stop the opponent's counter-play, and since Black is threatening ... Δ a5-c4, he plays:

22 $\mathbb{H}$ b1 b4 23 h3!

Yusupov points out that this not only prevents the active ... $\mathbb{W}$ g4, but it also creates a useful escape square. Now Black does the same; but he later he considered 23... $\mathbb{H}$ b6 or 23... $\mathbb{H}$ a4 to be more accurate.

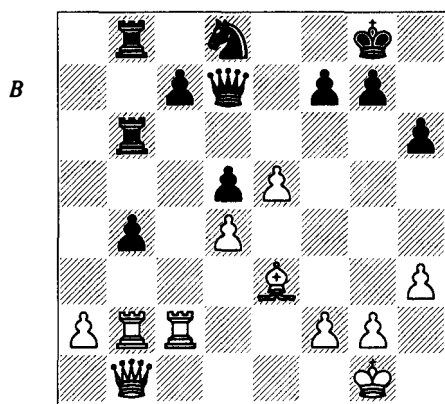
23...h6!? 24 $\mathbb{C}$ c1!

More prevention! Now on 24... Δ a5, White plays 25 $\mathbb{W}$ b1!, with the idea 25... Δ c4 26 $\mathbb{H}$ xb4 $\mathbb{H}$ xb4 27 $\mathbb{W}$ xb4 $\mathbb{H}$ xa2?? 28 $\mathbb{W}$ b8+ Δ h7 29 $\mathbb{W}$ b1+.

24... $\mathbb{H}$ b6 25 $\mathbb{W}$ b1 $\mathbb{H}$ ab8

Later, Yusupov preferred 25... $\mathbb{H}$ a4, but this was hard to anticipate. After the text, he is again threatening ... Δ a5, so:

26 $\mathbb{H}$ c5 Δ d8 27 $\mathbb{C}$ cc2! (D)



This time stopping ... Δ b7-a5.

27... Δ c6 28 $\mathbb{W}$ c1 $\mathbb{H}$ 8b7 29 $\mathbb{H}$ c5

Again stopping ... Δ a5! As Yusupov says: "When you are not permitted to carry out your main idea it is very difficult to carry on the fight."

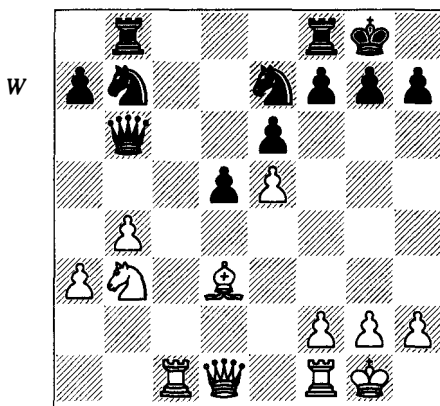
29... Δ e7 30 Δ h2 Δ f5?

A blunder, losing a pawn. Black should try 30...c6, although White will be able to advance his kingside pawns, now that the queenside is under control. The rest is basically technique, even if it becomes rather messy:

31 $\mathbb{H}$ bc2 $\mathbb{H}$ g6 32 $\mathbb{H}$ xc7 $\mathbb{H}$ xc7 33 $\mathbb{H}$ xc7 $\mathbb{W}$ b5 34 g4! Δ h4 35 $\mathbb{H}$ c8+?!

35 $\mathbb{W}$ c5! would have won by force – Yusupov.

35... Δ h7 36 $\mathbb{W}$ d1 $\mathbb{W}$ a6 37 $\mathbb{H}$ c2 f5 38 Δ g3! fxg4 39 Δ xh4 gxh3 40 f4 $\mathbb{W}$ e6 41 $\mathbb{W}$ h5 $\mathbb{W}$ e7+ 42 Δ xh3 $\mathbb{W}$ f7 43 $\mathbb{H}$ h2! $\mathbb{W}$ d7+ 44 f5 1-0



Karpov – Bagirov

Riga 1970

Dvoretsky also discusses this position. The situation looks promising for White. Black's knight on b7 is severely restricted, and White has both space and a bishop vs a knight. But Black is threatening 27...a5 28 b5 a4! followed by ... Δ c5, and in addition, the move ...f6 is an attractive freeing move, e.g., 27 $\mathbb{W}$ d2 f6!. Karpov prosecutes his advantage by squelching these ideas:

27 $\mathbb{W}$ g4!

Now Dvoretsky points out that 27...f6 28 $\mathbb{W}$ h4 Δ g6 (or 28...h6 29 $\mathbb{H}$ fe1) 29 Δ xg6 hxg6 30 $\mathbb{W}$ g3 favours White, as does 27...a5 28 b5 (or 28 $\mathbb{W}$ d4) 28... $\mathbb{H}$ fc8 29 a4. So Black tries to defend against the most obvious white threat, 28 Δ xh7+ followed by 29 $\mathbb{W}$ h4+ and 30 $\mathbb{W}$ xe7.

27...f5 28 $\mathbb{W}$ d4! Δ d8 29 b5!

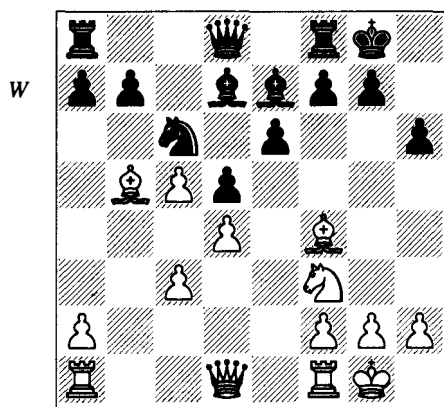
Prophylaxis; Black wanted to play ... Δ c6. The rest is a rather simple matter of dominating the queenside squares and pushing his pawns there through to victory:

29...g5 30 a4 Δ g6 31 $\mathbb{W}$ a1 $\mathbb{W}$ b7 32 $\mathbb{H}$ fe1 $\mathbb{W}$ g7 33 Δ c5 $\mathbb{H}$ f7 34 a5 $\mathbb{H}$ e7 35 Δ a6 $\mathbb{H}$ a8 36 Δ f1 Δ f7 37 Δ c7 $\mathbb{H}$ d8 38 $\mathbb{H}$ c6 Δ f8 39 b6 axb6 40 a6 Δ h6 41 $\mathbb{H}$ ec1 Δ g4 42 a7 Δ xe5 43 $\mathbb{H}$ 6c2 Δ c4 44 a8 $\mathbb{W}$ $\mathbb{H}$ xa8 45 Δ xa8 b5 46 $\mathbb{H}$ a2 $\mathbb{H}$ b7 1-0

Of course, not everyone can play like Karpov. Svidler recounts how, in the recent FIDE World Championship knockout tournament in

Groningen, he “got a sudden fit of prophylaxis. Remembering the years when I was a student of a school of the Best Chess Trainer in the World [Dvoretsky – JW], I constructed the following logical chain...” Svidler then describes how he followed a complex and entirely logical prophylactic chain of thought which, however, led to his blundering away a pawn in two moves! One must always have the highest respect for tactics.

As might be expected, Garry Kasparov is not known for a patient prophylactic style. But here’s an example which could be straight out of a game by Petrosian or Karpov:



Kasparov – Anand
Amsterdam 1996

This is a fairly normal type of position from a Caro-Kann Defence, Panov-Botvinnik Attack. White has space and a grip on e5, but as so often in these positions, the simple break by ...b6 threatens to expose drawbacks in his pawn structure along the a- and c-files.

13 ♖c1!

Kasparov modestly gives this ‘!’. It is indeed the kind of move which takes courage to play, shifting a rook to a completely closed file (a problem with these ‘mysterious rook moves’, to be sure: what if they remain mysterious?). But it fulfils the primary goal of prophylactic play: to stop the opponent’s main plan. And more importantly, the details are brilliantly worked out.

13...b6?!

This is the move 13 ♖c1 was designed to prevent, so we’ll make Kasparov’s analysis of it

our main line. Anand actually played 13...♗e8 (! – Kasparov), but White maintained an edge after 14 ♗e1 ♕f6, and now 15 ♗d3! was best, intending 15...b6 16 cxb6 axb6 17 ♗b1, intending ♗d3.

I think that the simple 13...♗e5 (!, intending 14 ♗d7 ♖xf3+) might have taken one of those ‘!’s away from 13 ♖c1; but that’s just a detail. The depth and beauty of Kasparov’s conception is still admirable.

14 c4!

The point. Now we give the outlines of Kasparov’s analysis. Note that the main line had to be foreseen precisely; this gives us a clue as to why White is the best player in the world:

14...bxc5

After 14...dxc4, simply 15 ♗xc4 is clearly better for White, in contrast to 15 d5 ♗b4! with unclear complications.

15 dxc5 dxc4

After 15...a6 16 ♗a4 dxc4, 17 ♖xc4 clearly favours White.

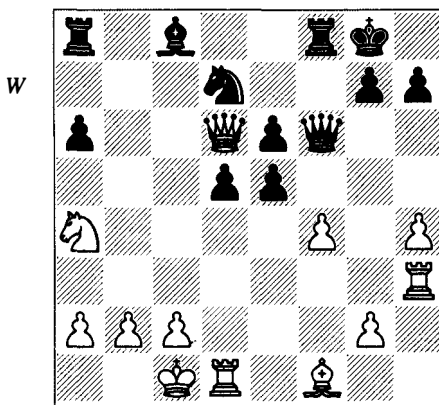
16 ♗xc4 ♗xc5 17 ♗b5 ♗e7 18 ♗c2 ♗d4 19 ♗xc5 ♗xc5 20 ♖xc5 ♗xb5

White’s material triumphs after 20...♗xb5 21 ♗xd4 ♗xf1 22 ♗xf1.

21 a4! ♗a3 22 ♖c3

The knight is trapped! This is only 8 moves after 13 ♖c1, but to be sure about such a calculation is a mark of greatness.

We might also speak of a type of ‘attacking prophylaxis’, involving sacrifices to tie down the opponent. Here is a nice example:



Kasparov – Short
Amsterdam 1994

A double-edged position. Black's central pawn-mass is apparently asserting itself, since 18 fxe5 can be answered by 18...♖f4+ 19 ♖b1 and either 19...♗xa4 or 19...♗xf1, whereas something like 18 ♖f3 e4 19 ♖f2 ♗xh4 20 ♗xe6+ ♖f7 seems to offer Black enough play. Kasparov finds the ideal move to keep Black tied down:

18 f5!! ♗h6+

His first point is 18...♗xf5? 19 ♖f3 ♗g4 20 ♖xf8+ ♖xf8 21 ♖b6 and White wins.

19 ♖b1 ♖xf5 20 ♖f3!

Slow and simple, cutting down on Black's play. Now 20...♗f6 21 ♖xf5 ♗xf5 22 ♖e2! leaves Black at a loss for a move, e.g. 22...♗f7 23 ♖g4! ♖f6 24 ♖b6 ♖xg4 25 ♖xa8. But the game is very similar:

20...♖xf3 21 gxf3 ♗f6 22 ♖h3 ♖f7 23 c4!

Cracking open lines. 23 f4 was another strong move. After the text-move, we return to a normal attack based on key squares and initiative. Black should probably keep lines closed by 23...d4, although 24 c5! is very good for White; again, Black has no counterplay.

23...dxc4?! 24 ♖c3! ♗e7 25 ♗c6 ♖b8 26 ♖e4 ♖b6 27 ♖g5+ ♖g8 28 ♗e4! g6 29 ♗xe5 ♖b7 30 ♖d6! c3 31 ♖xe6+ ♖xe6 32 ♖xe6 1-0

On 32...♖c4, White has a choice of wins, including 33 ♗xc3!? ♖a3+ 34 ♖c1 ♗d7 and now 35 ♖c6! or 35 bxa3 ♖c7 36 ♖e8+!.

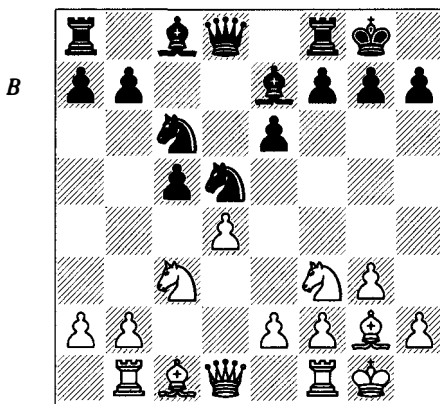
Finally, we have what might be called 'weird prophylaxis'! This is on the outer fringe of modern chess, and refers to cases when one player makes a move designed *perhaps* to render his opponent's most likely plans useless! The move itself may be rather suspicious-looking and hard to fully justify. A brilliant example of this is given in the following game by Suba, who incidentally as a bonus provides us with some other delightfully modern moves:

Suba – Petursson

Thessaloniki Olympiad 1984

1 c4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♖f6 3 ♖c3 e6 4 g3 ♖c6 5 ♖g2 ♖e7 6 0-0 0-0 7 d4 d5 8 cxd5 ♖xd5 9 ♖b1!?
(D)

A 'mysterious rook move', indeed! The idea is 100% prophylactic, to improve White's chances against any reasonable black plan. For



example, 9...cxd4 10 ♖xd4 ♖xd4 11 ♗xd4 ♖f6 12 ♗c4 ♖xc3 13 bxc3 opens the b-file with ideas such as ♖a3 and ♖fd1 looming. Then 13...♗a5 14 ♖e3! ♗xc3 15 ♗a4! launched a terrific attack against Black's queenside in Suba-Cebalo, Skopje 1984 (the stem game for 9 ♖b1). And on 9...♗a5, Suba gives the entertaining 10 ♖d2!, sacrificing the a-pawn for more than adequate compensation. Of course, 9...♖xc3 10 bxc3 makes little sense for Black; and if Black passes, for instance, by 9...a6, then the move 10 e4 leads to advantage, in view of lines like 10...♖b6 11 dxc5! ♗xd1 12 ♖xd1 ♖xc5 13 e5! intending ♖e4. Here the move 9 ♖b1 again shows its worth after 13...♖c4 14 ♖f4!, when b2 is defended.

9...♖f6

A very reasonable idea. Now Suba points out the move 10 e3, but the course he chooses is also logical.

10 ♖xd5 ♗xd5!?

After this, White seems better. Suba mentions the idea 10...exd5!?, and gives 11 ♖e3 c4 12 b3 ♖f5 13 ♖c1 b5 14 bxc4 bxc4 15 ♖e5! ♖c8-16 f4 as a promising continuation.

11 dxc5 ♗xc5 12 ♗a4 ♖d7 13 ♖e3 ♗e7 14 ♗e4 ♖ac8 15 b4 b6 16 ♖d2!

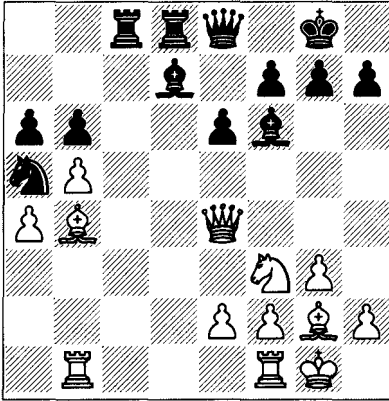
A nice retreat, preparing b5 and ♖b4.

16...♖fd8 17 b5 ♖a5 18 ♖b4 ♗e8 19 a4 a6
(D)

20 ♖xa5!

In gross violation of 'principle', White exchanges a dominant bishop for the dreaded 'knight on the rim'! Of course, this is purely a pragmatic decision based upon both the strength of his passed pawn and some excellent calculation!

W



20...bxa5 21 bxa6 ♖xa4 22 ♜fc1 ♙c6 23 ♜e3 g6 24 a7 a4 25 ♜e5 ♙xg2 26 ♜xc8 ♜xc8 27 ♜xg2 a3

Now it's a race, and White's extra tempo allows him to win very prettily:

28 ♜d7! ♙b2

To escort his pawn in. Instead, 28...♜xd7 29 ♜b8 a2 30 a8♜ wins after 30...♜xb8 31 ♜xb8+

♜g7 32 ♜a3! ♜d5+ 33 e4! and White escapes perpetual check.

29 ♜xa3!!

Eliminating the a-pawn and ensuring himself a winning ending.

29...♙xa3 30 ♜f6+ ♜f8 31 ♜xe8 ♜a8 32 ♜b7 ♙c5 33 ♜f6 ♜g7 34 ♜e4 ♙xa7?!

The alternative 34...♙d4 35 ♜g5 ♜xa7 36 ♜xe6+ and ♜xa7 would not hold in the long run.

35 ♜g5 ♜g8 36 ♜xf7 ♙c5 37 ♜g5 ♜e8 38 h4 h6 39 ♜f7 ♙f8 40 ♜e5 g5 41 hxg5 hxg5 42 ♜f3 ♜e7 43 ♜b5! 1-0

The g-pawn will also fall, even after 43...g4 44 ♜g5+ ♜g7 45 ♜xg7+ and 46 ♜h2.

In conclusion, the future of prophylactic moves and prophylactic thinking is bright. The fact that modern books and annotations increasingly refer to such concepts indicates that they are now a permanent part of the new chess landscape.

10 Dynamism: The Modern Difference

This chapter deals with the subject of dynamism in modern chess. 'Dynamism' is a broad abstraction of the type I am not that comfortable with, but there are two reasons for focusing our attention on it. First, it is the single word most associated with modern chess, and the description resorted to by top players and theoreticians when they are trying to describe the modern style. For that reason alone, we should examine what is meant by the term. But I have also found this topic to be a convenient excuse for showing the reader some exciting modern games.

What is Dynamism?

Obviously, dynamism has something to do with playing dynamically. Does that mean playing tactically? Let's hear what Suetin has to say about the difference: "The dynamic realization of possibilities dormant in the position usually takes place in a combinative manner. However, it would be wrong to equate this way of solving the problems of positions with purely tactical operations, although they resemble each other. The most essential characteristic of dynamic decisions consists always in the fact that they are connected with all the preceding strategic development of the game." In the context of today's game, we see that more and more players today are employing opening strategies in which dynamic considerations predominate. Also, positions in which no tactics are directly involved can contain 'latent dynamism', in that a player continually threatens to activate most of his pieces at once with a pawn move or sacrifice, and such threats must be constantly attended to by the other side. Many modern openings lead to these hidden dynamic possibilities, such as Hedgehog structures and dynamic counterattacking openings like the Sicilian, Benoni, and King's Indian Defences, to name just a few. To the outside observer, such positions always

seem on the verge of 'boiling over', even if no direct clash is taking place.

As usual, it's interesting to look at this question historically. There is surprising agreement among chess writers (Réti, Euwe, Romanovsky, Pachman and Suetin, for example) as to the general styles of the great players. They acknowledge Steinitz as the founder of the positional school, with his identification of weak points, pawn structures, various static features, and above all, the theory of the accumulation of small advantages. To a great extent, his approach was extended and refined by Tarrasch, Rubinstein, Capablanca, and most of the best players of the first three decades of the twentieth century. With the decline of the romantics (e.g., Zukertort, Blackburne, Marshall, and Chigorin), Suetin points out that Spielmann was one of the few defenders of a purely dynamic style of play during that period. And Nimzowitsch himself occupied a very interesting middle ground. As Romanovsky describes it, during the first part of his career, "his fiery temperament, dynamic thoughts, splendid and original imagination earned him deserved fame as an artist of chess." Later, according to Romanovsky, he "slipped into the position of a conservative ... he created the theory of restraint, blockade, overprotection ... By elevating these 'principles' in this way to the rank of dogma (as Tarrasch had done in his time...), Nimzowitsch came to suffer telling defeats when encountering opponents renowned for great dynamicity [sic] of thought, particularly Alekhine." Perhaps a fairer way to characterize Nimzowitsch's transition would be that he moved from being an eccentric, dynamic player who often resorted to tactics to one who, like Steinitz, was obsessed with the static features of positions, sometimes to the neglect of dynamics. This new style nevertheless led to some beautiful and imaginative victories, which Romanovsky doesn't seem to acknowledge.

At any rate, everyone agrees that the revolutionary change in the realm of static versus dynamic play began with Alekhine, followed by the Soviet masters of the 1930s and 1940s. Suetin has some insightful observations about this subject. He points out that chess-players have always played mainly by intuition. "Obviously, the great master, endowed by nature, is an artist of the first class, to whichever school he may belong. It is for this reason that one comes across the elements of dynamics so frequently in the games of Steinitz, Tarrasch, Rubinstein, and many other representatives of the positional school. If the problems of the position demanded dynamic decisions, then intuition helped them to reach them and to overcome the dogmatic confines of their school."

Well then, what was the difference between the 'positional' and 'dynamic' players? As Suetin so accurately explains, players of the dynamic modern school turned this intuition into a conscious part of their play, and they increasingly learned how to create positions in which the dynamic element was the dominant one. By contrast, "the adherents of the positional school ... indeed anticipated the dynamic factors which become operative during the struggle and which are independent of their will. But through their limited theoretical judgements they were not in a position consciously to bring about dynamically stamped positions. Their knowledge of dynamics remained superficial and was unable to influence substantially the direction of style." Hence the sterility of chess that Capablanca complained about; for all his greatness, he had an ultimately limiting dogmatism. In Suetin's terms, he and his contemporaries were not predisposed to consciously introduce dynamic imbalances into their games. It took Alekhine and his descendants to expand the game in this fashion.

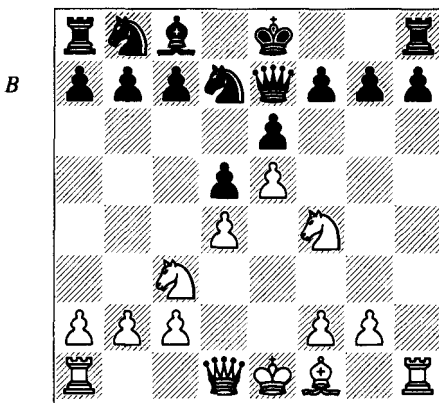
Réti, too, has pertinent things to say about the dynamism that was just beginning to appear in his time. Speaking of Bogoljubow's style, he sounds remarkably like the modern GM Suba (see below) in describing situations laden with what we now call 'latent dynamism':

"In recent years, it has generally been the custom to judge a position from the viewpoint of action, thus contrasting with, or, properly speaking, supplementing Steinitz's static view

of the position (weak points, etc.). Seemingly poor, restricted positions may be good ones, if they are capable of development and offer possibilities of planning ahead. On the other hand, a fine, unrestricted position, which is seemingly better, may sometimes actually be bad, if it is not capable of development and no plan can be discovered for making it stronger." [MOC]

This is precisely the point Suba makes about the Hedgehog formation and other modern positions. Réti speaks in the same vein about Alekhine: "The dry methodical process, of which the chess technique then consisted, did not suit him. The positional consideration at that time was static, not dynamic. Then it was that in every position the best move and not the deepest and far-reaching plan was sought for ... The striving not to allow himself to be deceived by the apparent simplicity of a position and by obvious moves led him slowly in a new direction, whilst ... Rubinstein and Nimzowitsch, by treading the old well-known paths, tried to approach truth in chess." [MIC]

Of course, the real 'truth' was that dynamic elements would become as much a part of the game as static positional ones. Eventually, long-term dynamic advantages and sustained initiative were taken quite as seriously as pawn weaknesses or misplaced pieces. Alekhine's early conversion to this point of view is shown, for example, in his imaginative gambit line 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♖c3 ♗f6 4 ♙g5 ♙e7 5 e5 ♗fd7 6 h4!? ♙xg5 7 hxg5 ♗xg5 8 ♘h3 ♗e7 9 ♗f4 (D).



Black has no weaknesses and a variety of defensive options. Unlike earlier gambits, the

play here takes on a non-forcing character, and yet White maintains a large lead in development with superior piece play, which makes it difficult for Black to free his game. Whether or not this particular gambit is fully sound, that idea – sustained pressure over the long term – characterizes the typical modern pawn sacrifice, as we saw in Chapter 3.

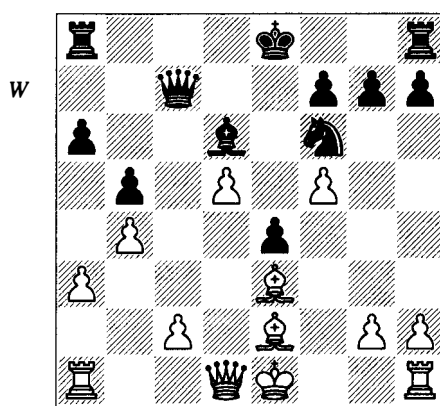
Accumulation or Plunder?

Nimzowitsch may have drifted into overly-static positional play; but he is on record in *My System* denigrating Steinitz's 'accumulation of small advantages', assigning it a 'subordinate role' and referring to it as a 'petty storing up in values'. Today, the Romanian GM and radical theoretician Mihai Suba goes much farther, claiming that "the archaic concept of 'improving the position' is static and irrelevant"! Since each move of the opponent changes the position, he reasons, it is more relevant to speak of 'dynamic strategy', which he describes as "an attempt to revise the standard, static, conservative opinion on what strategy should be (a collection of rules about the centre, fixed pawn structure...) and highlight strategy as a continuous process dealing with the present, the near future, and the distant future of modern chess positions ... [it] tries to restore respect for opponents and for the realistic positions which arise in modern chess, where a 'one doing, another applauding' plan is not available."

There's a lot to be said for this point of view. I particularly like the 'one doing, another applauding' phrase, because that's so often what we get in our middlegame and instructional books. Also, static considerations can be so easily swamped by dynamic ones in practice. In top-flight chess today, one rarely gets the impression that the opponents are scratching and clawing to 'accumulate small advantages'; rather, they seem to be interested in major plunder! A high percentage of games are characterized by an ongoing dynamic tension which threatens to recoil against either player at a moment's notice. This is, of course, related to the modern opening. Sustained, unclear, double-edged play seems to be the rule rather than the exception with players such as Kasparov, Shirov, Anand, Topalov, Ivanchuk, and Polgar;

and even the somewhat more positionally-oriented players such as Karpov and Kramnik are continually submerged in, and at home with, that kind of unclear slugfest. The best way to see this is not to take my word for it, but to examine collections of games by the top players. Nor is this merely a characteristic of the super-GMs, as a study of the games from any international tournament will tell you.

It seems absurd to try to provide 'examples' of dynamic play, as they are everywhere (and scattered throughout this book as well). Perhaps a look at a few of Shirov's efforts will be useful, since, like so many of Kasparov's, they often reflect the depth of opening preparation and its role in creating such dynamic situations. But there is another interesting aspect to Shirov's play. It has often been said that Mikhail Tal, like Petrosian, was a World Champion without stylistic descendants. The idea was that no one else could get away with his irrational and often unsound sacrifices. While it is true that players defend better today, and are willing to accept sacrifices at the cost of some discomfort, Shirov (a Latvian, like Tal) has consistently been successful at making outrageous sacrifices for rather dubious but hard-to-refute attacks. Here are two examples:



Shirov – Stohl
Bundesliga 1993/4

White seems to have been outplayed in this opening (a typically sharp Sicilian), and one might expect a bail-out with 20 g3 ♖c3+ 21 ♙d2 ♗d4 22 ♙g5 ♗c3+ 23 ♙d2, etc., more or less forcing a draw. But Shirov conceives of a

way to get some passed pawns on the queen-side, despite great risk to his own king:

20 c4!? ♟xh2 21 d6!? ♟xd6

The two-bishop, pawn-down ending after 21...♟xd6 22 ♟xd6 ♟xd6 23 cxb5 axb5 24 ♟xb5+ ♟e7 25 ♟e2 is extremely dangerous for Black due to White's passed pawns.

22 ♟c1 ♟g3+ 23 ♟f1 ♟e5 24 cxb5 ♟d5 25 ♟d4 ♟xf5+ 26 ♟g1 ♟e5

A critical point. Now the lines 27 ♟d2 0-0 28 bxa6 ♟fd8! and 27 ♟c5 ♟xe3 28 ♟h5 g5 29 ♟xe3 ♟f4 30 ♟d4 0-0 31 ♟c5 ♟g6 32 bxa6 ♟fd8! 33 ♟c3 ♟xa6! show how dangerously exposed White's king is. Shirov finds an incredible solution:

27 ♟xd5!! ♟h2+ 28 ♟xh2 ♟xd5 29 ♟h5!

This move ultimately keeps the king in the centre. Now Black plays a natural move, but he would be better served to give up castling right away by 29...♟a2! 30 ♟e5+ ♟f8, e.g., 31 ♟c5+ ♟g8 32 ♟c4 ♟xa3 33 ♟f1 h6 34 bxa6 ♟xa6, etc. But this is hard to accede to, when the white rook can be kept out of play instead:

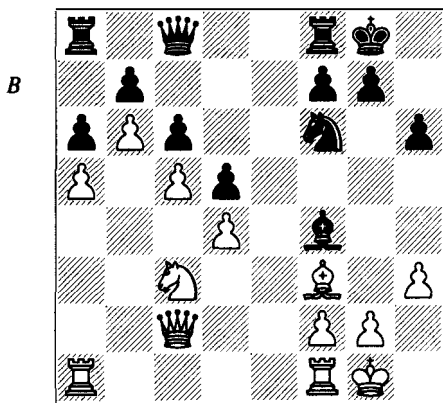
29...♟f5?! 30 bxa6 g6 31 ♟h3 h5!? 32 ♟c7 ♟f8

Trying to exchange pieces, but Shirov's passed queenside pawns and bishop-pair seem well worth the queen now.

33 ♟c5 ♟f7 34 ♟b5+ ♟d8 35 ♟c6 ♟c8??

Black collapses under the pressure. According to Eising, he should play 35...♟d1+ 36 ♟h2 ♟g4!, threatening ...f4, when White should in turn take the draw by 37 ♟b6+ ♟e7 38 ♟c5+.

36 ♟d6+ 1-0



Kramnik – Shirov

Linares 1994

Even against such competition, he shows amazing optimism by preparing the following sacrifice:

23...♟d7?! 24 g3 ♟xh3 25 ♟g2 ♟h5 26 gxf4 ♟g4 27 ♟fd1!

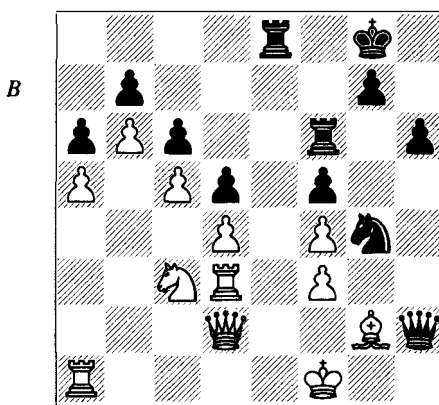
This really makes Black's idea look silly. But Shirov persists in finding the most amazing resources for his unsound attack:

27...♟ae8 28 ♟d3! ♟h2+ 29 ♟f1 f5!

Preparing the following rook lift. 29...♟xf4 30 ♟d2! would be hopeless.

30 ♟d2 ♟f6! 31 f3! (D)

White dodges Shirov's clever idea: 31 ♟h3? ♟g6!.



Now Black must be lost, right? But:

31...♟e4!!

"They can only take one at a time!", as Tal himself once said. And 32 fxe4 fxe4 would force White to return the rook immediately by 33 ♟e2. Kramnik finds a dynamic riposte:

32 ♟xd5! cxd5 33 c6 ♟xf4!

Not 33...♟xc6? 34 fxe4 and ♟h3 next. But now White gets an apparently decisive passed pawn.

34 cxb7 ♟e4! 35 ♟c1?

This is so tempting, to support the pawn, but White could stay on top by 35 b8♟+ ♟xb8 36 fxg4 ♟xg4 37 ♟xd5+ ♟h7 38 ♟cl.

35...♟h7 36 b8♟!

There is only a draw after 36 ♟c8 ♟g3! 37 b8♟ ♟h2+ 38 ♟gl ♟el+ 39 ♟xel ♟xel+ 40 ♟xh2 ♟h4+.

36...♟xb8 37 fxg4 ♟h2! 38 ♟f3 ♟xg4 39 b7?

White can still try to win by 39 ♟f2 ♟fg6 40 ♟xd5, when Kramnik suggested 40...♟h3+ 41 ♟e2 ♟d6.

39...♖fg6 40 ♖c2?

Better is 40 b8 ♖xb8 41 ♖f2, although by now, Black has material equality and a serious attack. After this mistake, it's over.

40...♖xg2 41 ♖xg2 ♖xg2 42 ♖xg2 ♖h1+ 43 ♖f2 ♖b1 0-1

Mostly, however, Shirov's dynamism is less speculative than this, and more founded in the fundamental characteristics of his position. In his brilliant book *Fire on Board* (a virtual treasury of modern dynamic play), he devotes a separate chapter to his adventures on both sides of the Botvinnik Variation of the Semi-Slav Defence. The remarkable but typical thing about these games is that, although they often diverge from preparation only at a late stage (say, move 18 or 20), they are consistently full of rich and unforeseeable complications. This is true to such an extent that the players find themselves forced to come up with one terrific move after another just to survive, and end up in time-trouble despite the time-saving initial moves. This paradox, that deeply-prepared variations can produce incredibly creative over-the-board contests, manifests itself time and again in contemporary chess. The fact that both sides continue to play some heavily-analysed and tactically-rich opening indicates that there is a strategic and dynamic balance which, with good play, will persist throughout the game. It is this lasting quality of the positional and tactical balance which leads to so many exciting and original games.

P. Nikolić – Shirov

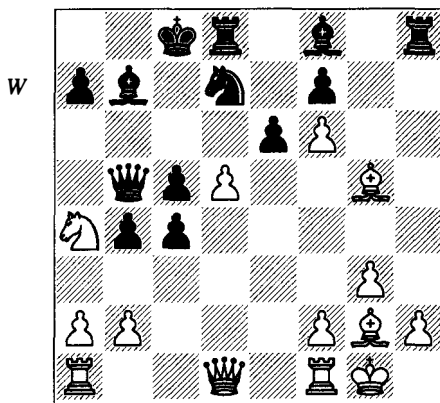
Wijk aan Zee 1993

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♖f3 ♖f6 4 ♖c3 e6 5 ♖g5 dxc4 6 e4 b5 7 e5 h6 8 ♖h4 g5 9 ♖xg5 hxg5 10 ♖xg5 ♖bd7 11 g3

Of Shirov's many other beautiful games in this line, the following is presented without notes. Notice the amazing effrontery of the black king at the end, blithely stepping into discovered and double checks! Kamsky-Shirov, World Team Ch, Lucerne 1993: 11 exf6 ♖b7 12 g3 c5 13 d5 ♖h6 14 ♖xh6 ♖xh6 15 ♖d2 ♖xf6 16 0-0-0 ♖f8! 17 f4 ♖b6 18 ♖g2 exd5 19 ♖f2 ♖c8 20 ♖xb5 ♖a4! 21 ♖c2 ♖a6! 22 ♖a3 c3! 23 ♖xd5?! ♖xb2 24 ♖f5 ♖f6 25 ♖h7

♖xa3! 26 ♖h8+ ♖e7 27 ♖he1+ ♖d7! 28 ♖h3+ ♖d6! 29 ♖xb7+ ♖xd1+ 30 ♖xd1 ♖xa2 31 ♖g2 ♖b1+ 0-1.

11...♖b7 12 ♖g2 ♖b6 13 exf6 0-0-0 14 0-0 c5 15 d5 b4 16 ♖a4 ♖b5 (D)



17 dxex6

Shirov's losses have also been classics. In the following game, Ivanchuk came up with the amazing 21 ♖g7!! over the board: 17 a3 exd5 18 axb4 cxb4 19 ♖e3 ♖c5 20 ♖g4+ ♖d7 21 ♖g7!! ♖xg7 22 fxg7 ♖g8 23 ♖xc5 d4 24 ♖xb7+ ♖xb7 25 ♖xb7 ♖b6 26 ♖xd4!! ♖xd4 27 ♖fd1 ♖xb2 (27...♖g4!?) 28 ♖d6+ ♖b8 29 ♖db1 ♖xg7 30 ♖xb4+ ♖c7 31 ♖a6! ♖b8 32 ♖xa7+ ♖xd6 33 ♖xb8 ♖g4 34 ♖d8+ ♖c6 35 ♖a1 1-0 Ivanchuk-Shirov, Wijk aan Zee 1996.

Note how, despite the 'waste' of 15-20 moves of prepared moves in all of these examples, the games are in no way lacking in drama and complexity. In fact, any of them would take analysis of Hübneresque proportions to discover what is really happening.

17...♖xg2 18 ♖xg2 ♖c6+ 19 f3 ♖xe6 20 ♖c2 ♖e5 21 ♖ae1 ♖d4!?

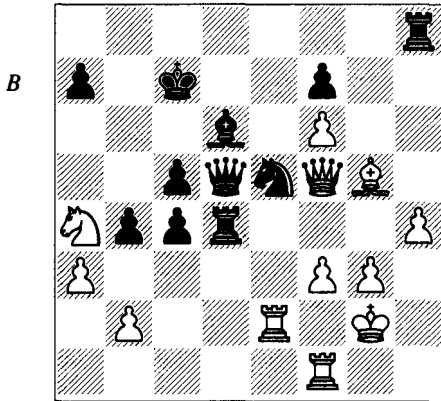
A move discovered by Tal himself who, for obvious reasons, was also attracted to this variation. The only definite thing that can be said about such positions is that they are an utter mess!

22 h4 ♖d6 23 a3 ♖d5! 24 ♖f5+ ♖c7! 25 ♖e2 (D)

25...♖c6!!

Forward! Shirov characteristically uses every piece; even his king is needed to hold together Black's position in what follows.

26 b3! c3!



White is trying to open lines and Black to keep his king safe, e.g., 26...cxb3?! 27 axb4 cxb4 28 ♖c1+ ♕c4 29 ♜b1! would be uncomfortable.

27 axb4 cxb4 28 ♖a1! ♕d3!

Protecting against sacrifices on c3 by getting rid of the queens.

29 ♜xd5+ ♜xd5! 30 ♖e4! ♜b5 31 ♖c4! ♖e8! 32 ♖a2! ♕e1+ 33 ♜h3 ♕xf3 34 ♖xc3! ♕xg5+ 35 hxg5 ♖h8+ 36 ♜g2 bxc3 37 ♕xc3+ ♜c6 38 ♕xd5 ♜xd5 39 ♖xa7 ♜e6 40 ♖a4?

At the last minute (on the 40th move!), after putting up an heroic defence, White falters. He had a problem-like draw by 40 ♜f3! ♖h3 41 ♜g4 ♖xg3+ 42 ♜h5 ♖h3+ 43 ♜g4 ♖xb3 44 ♖a6 ♖g3+ 45 ♜h5 ♜f5 46 ♖a5+ ♖e5 47 ♜h6, etc.

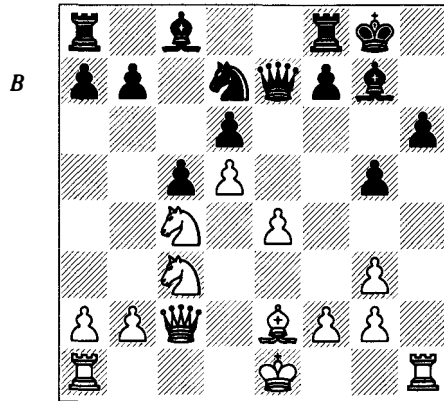
40...♖g8 41 ♖g4 ♖e5 0-1

Since ...♜f5 will follow.

Dynamic Balance and Planning

The comments above on modern openings which lead to long-term dynamically-balanced play also apply to positions which are not particularly theoretical. Suetin gives us a revealing example of how positional ‘transformations’ (trading of advantages for other advantages) sometimes fail to affect an overall assessment despite large swings in structure or material.

In the following position, Black has two bishops, with a particularly influential one on g7; White has space, and prospects of occupying weakened squares on Black’s kingside. Play continued:



Uhlmann – Pietzsch

Zinnowitz 1967

15...♕e5 16 ♕e3 ♖d7 17 a4 a6 18 a5! ♖fb8! 19 ♕a4 ♖xa4!

Black had to anticipate this move, voluntarily giving up the mega-square f5 in return for tremendous pressure on the open b-file. Especially since White hasn’t castled, the second player has just enough free piece-play to compensate for the awful weaknesses on his kingside.

20 ♖xa4 b5 21 axb6 ♖xb6 22 ♕f5 ♜b7 23 ♖a2 ♖b8 24 f4 ♕g6! 25 0-0

White’s rook would just be out of play after 25 ♕xh6+ ♖xh6 26 ♖xh6 gxf4 27 gxf4 ♖xb2 28 ♖xb2 ♜xb2 29 ♜xb2 ♖xb2.

25...♖xb2 26 ♖xb2 ♜xb2 27 ♜xb2 ♖xb2 28 ♖xa6 ♖b4! 29 e5!

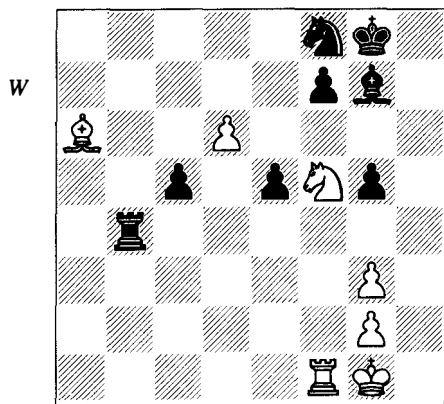
“Paradoxical as it may sound, one must sometimes sacrifice material to maintain the balance,” comments Suetin; “Though White succeeds in creating a passed pawn on the d-file, the inner balance remains.” And the alternatives show how this works: 29 ♕xd6?? ♖b6 or 29 ♖d3 ♖f8 and White is tied down, e.g., 30 ♜h2 c4 31 ♖c2 ♖b2 32 ♕e3 c3.

29...dxe5 30 fxg5 hxg5 31 d6 ♕f8? (D)

Suetin doesn’t question this, but it was better to go into defensive mode by 31...♖b8!, when Black seems OK, e.g., 32 ♖c4 ♖f8 or 32 ♖d1 e4 33 d7 ♖d8 34 ♖c8 ♕e5.

32 ♖c8?

The alternative “32 ♕e7+ ♜h8 33 ♖xf7 ♖b6 34 ♕f5 ♖xa6 35 ♖xg7 ♖xd6! gives White nothing” (Suetin). But – and this is one reason I’ve used this example – he has overlooked the



killing improvement 34 ♔f1!, threatening ♕f5, e.g. 34... ♖xd6 35 ♖xg7! or 34... ♕e6 35 ♕f5 e4 36 ♖e7, winning.

What is the lesson here? Perhaps that even though 'dynamic balance' certainly exists (as the history of the ultra-sharp modern openings described above confirms), the resulting play tends to be delicate in the extreme, such that creative tactics are a far more important factor in actual play than any abstract assessment of 'equal'. Another way to look at this is that if the likes of Kasparov, Kramnik, Shirov, and Anand seldom play a game without numerous mistakes in such positions, we can expect consistently decisive results to arise, usually in favour of the better player on that particular day.

32... ♔f6

Now Black is holding again, although there are several interesting options in the rest of the game which the reader might be interested to explore:

33 ♕h6+ ♖g7 34 ♕g4 ♔d8 35 ♕xe5 ♔f6 36 ♕c6 ♖b6 37 ♕e7 ♔e5 38 ♕f5+ ♖g6 39 ♖d1 ♔f6 ½-½

This idea of dynamic balance brings up a subject which is not strictly in the province of middlegame theory, but rather in that of practical play. This is the nature of chess planning. I previously mentioned Dvoretsky's remarks on this subject, and they bear reviewing here. He says, very much in the spirit of Suba, that the popular idea of a profound plan which envelops nearly the whole game is a 'delusion': "It is nonsensical to map out an overly long plan – the very next move could totally change the situation on the board and give it a completely

different direction." Dvoretsky points out that in practice, players make only general plans, "noting the area and character of the approaching action", for example, something like attack on the queenside. Planning in more detail tends to occur mostly in what he calls 'separate strategic operations (which as a rule are quite small)'. Finally, he quotes Kotov from *Think Like a Grandmaster* (a much-maligned book in recent times): "The plan in a chess game is the sum total of one strategic operation after another, each fulfilling an independent idea which results from the demands of the position."

We are far enough along in this book to be able to reflect upon many varied examples of modern play. Having done so, who would not concur with Dvoretsky's insight? How often do we see anything resembling a 'Plan' with a capital 'P', in the old-fashioned sense of that word? In fact, the dynamically balanced nature of so much of modern chess negates that idea: today, in games where both sides play on both sides of the board and the initiative swings back and forth, planning is necessarily of a local and time-limited nature. There are exceptions, of course, but this is one of those cases where the exception proves the rule: although they still exist, we have to look hard and long for games in which one strategic factor dominates from beginning to end. Normally, such a game will be very pleasing, since in top-flight chess, the opposition seldom allows the smooth execution of a lengthy strategic plan. If such a plan both escapes notice and succeeds, therefore, it is probably of considerable profundity.

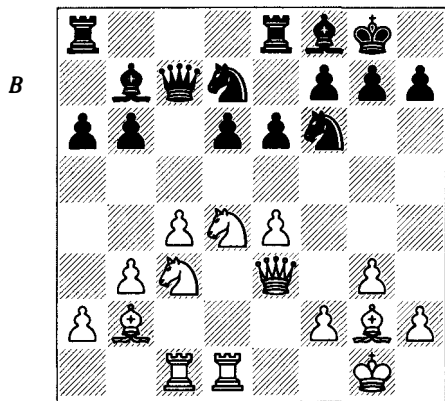
Optical Advantages versus Elasticity

Well, the adventures seen in the games above are familiar enough to the reader, and the main reason that I can call them 'modern' is that they occur so routinely and pervasively in modern practice. But there are other meanings to dynamism, as indicated earlier. Suba emphasizes the idea of 'dynamic potential', and in particular, he concurs with Suetin that "The option to choose between a good position that cannot be improved and a bad position that can be substantially improved is also modern." He refers

to this quality of potential improvement, along with the ability to adjust quickly to the opponent's plans, as the 'elasticity' of a position. I think that this concept can arise in almost every opening in which Black accepts less space for chances against White's centre, e.g., in certain variations of the Sicilian, the Pirc, and the King's, Queen's, and Nimzo-Indian Defences, as well as, for example, various modern defences with 1...g6 and 1...b6. Black's goal is to remain elastic and flexible, with many options for his pieces, whereas White at some point can become paralysed by the need to protect against various dynamic pawn-breaks. Suba brings our attention to an opening in which this concept *consistently* appears, the Hedgehog Variation of the English Opening. To see what he means, let's look at a couple of examples from his own practice.

M. Vukić – Suba
Vinkovci 1977

1 $\text{d}f3$ $\text{d}f6$ 2 $g3$ $b6$ 3 $\text{a}g2$ $\text{a}b7$ 4 0-0 $e6$ 5 $c4$ $c5$
6 $d4$ $cxd4$ 7 $\text{w}xd4$ $d6$ 8 $\text{d}c3$ $a6$ 9 $\text{d}d1$ $\text{w}c7$ 10
 $b3$ $\text{d}bd7$ 11 $\text{a}b2$ $\text{a}e7$ 12 $e4$ 0-0 13 $\text{w}e3$ $\text{f}fe8$
14 $\text{d}d4$ $\text{a}f8$ 15 $\text{a}ac1$ (D)



Let Suba himself comment: "A frequent picture in the Hedgehog. White's position looks ideal. That's the naked truth about it, but the 'ideal' has by definition one drawback – it cannot be improved." In his own terminology, White's position is inelastic.

15... $\text{a}ad8$ 16 $h3$ $g6$ 17 $\text{a}h2$ $\text{a}g7$ 18 $\text{w}e2$
 $\text{w}b8$ 19 $\text{w}c2$ $\text{f}c8$ 20 $\text{w}d2$ $\text{d}c5$ 21 $\text{a}e1$ $\text{w}a8$ 22
 $f3$

This is what Black wants, but 22 $\text{w}e2$ allows 22... $d5$! 23 $e5$ $\text{d}fe4$ 24 $\text{d}xe4$ $dxe4$ with the idea ... $\text{d}d3$ (Suba).

22... $\text{w}b8$

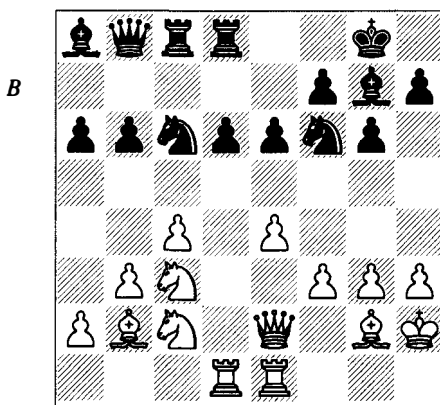
"Now the queen returns to probe the fresh weakness on g3."

23 $\text{f}cd1$ $\text{a}a8$ 24 $\text{d}de2$ $\text{f}ed8$ 25 $\text{d}d4$ $\text{d}cd7$
26 $\text{w}f2$

White's last two moves were virtually forced, to prevent ... $b5$ and then ... $d5$.

26... $\text{d}e5$ 27 $\text{w}e2$ $\text{d}c6$ 28 $\text{d}c2$? (D)

White has to acquiesce in allowing ... $b5$, which would occur after the better 28 $\text{d}xc6$ $\text{a}xc6$.



28... $\text{d}h5$!

Threatening ... $d5$ and unleashing the activity of Black's pieces. Note how a knight on the rim and pieces on the first rank begin to dominate the position in spite of a significant deficit in space. This is a stark example of how dynamic potential works.

29 $f4$ $b5$! 30 $cx b5$ $ax b5$ 31 $\text{a}f3$ $\text{d}e7$! 32
 $\text{d}d4$

Instead, 32 $\text{a}x h5$ $\text{a}xc3$ 33 $\text{a}xc3$ $\text{f}xc3$ 34
 $\text{a}f3$ $\text{f}dc8$ is depressing for White.

32... $b4$ 33 $\text{d}a4$ $\text{d}f6$ 34 $e5$ $dxe5$ 35 $fxe5$
 $\text{a}xf3$ 36 $\text{d}xf3$ $\text{d}fd5$

Now Black has the traditional advantage of an unshakeable knight on d5. The rest is pretty, but straightforward:

37 $\text{f}c1$ $\text{a}h6$ 38 $\text{f}c4$ $\text{d}e3$ 39 $\text{f}cc1$ $\text{d}7d5$ 40
 $\text{f}xc8$ $\text{f}xc8$ 41 $\text{w}f2$ $\text{d}f5$ 42 $\text{f}e2$ $\text{a}e3$ 43 $\text{w}e1$
 $\text{w}b5$ 44 $\text{d}d2$ $\text{w}d3$ 45 $\text{d}f1$

45 $\text{d}c4$ $\text{d}xg3$! 46 $\text{f}xe3$ $\text{d}xe3$ 47 $\text{d}xe3$
 $\text{w}xe3$! 48 $\text{w}xg3$ $\text{f}c2$ +.

45... $\text{f}c2$ 46 $\text{a}g2$ $\text{f}xg2$ + 47 $\text{a}xg2$ $\text{w}e4$ + 0-1

Larsen – Suba*Interzonal tournament, Las Palmas 1982*

1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 c5 3 g3 e6 4 ♘f3 b6 5 e4 ♙b7 6 d3 d6 7 ♙g2 ♙e7 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♙e1 a6 10 d4 cxd4 11 ♙xd4 ♘bd7 12 b3 ♙c7 13 ♙b2 ♙ac8 14 h3

Suba's own version of this game reports the move-order as 14 ♙e2 ♙fd8 15 ♙e3 ♙f8 16 ♘d4 ♙e8 17 h3. In any case, h3 serves to prevent the freeing move ...d5, since then e5 cannot be answered by ...♘g4. The continual necessity of monitoring ...b5 and ...d5 on every move is one of White's burdens in Hedgehog (and other English and Sicilian Defence) positions.

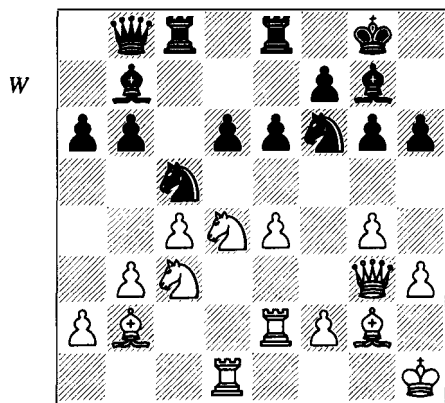
14... ♙fd8 15 ♙e3 ♙f8 16 ♘d4

The point of this reorganization, again, is to prevent ...b5; and the queen is needed on the rather awkward e3-square (see Black's next move) in order to answer ...d5 with e5. Thus, we see the active white position paradoxically tied down by the restricted black one!

16... ♙e8 17 ♙e2 ♙b8 18 ♙d1 g6

Again, we have a typical Hedgehog position in which White lacks a plan. As so often happens, he resorts to moves which are somewhat weakening and probably not justified:

19 ♙h1 ♙g7 20 g4?! h6 21 ♙g3?! ♘c5 (D)



22 ♙a1?!

It's interesting to reflect upon how our 'chessic eyes' have changed. By traditional standards, White's pieces are more active, and he has a bind on the centre with no weaknesses, whereas Black has a serious weakness on an open file (d6), a minor one on b6, and no pawns on the fourth rank with which to stake out a claim on the centre. But aside from the fact that White's last few moves have allowed Black to activate his pieces in one stroke (22 ♙e3 was probably best), we now know that in general, Black's dynamic possibilities prevent White from reorganizing his position to advantage. Suba recounts how, when this game was annotated, a respected grandmaster assumed that Black's play was unsound, and claimed that he 'deserved' a loss from this position. One needs to understand how dogmatic the old views on space were in order to appreciate the revolution which has taken place since.

22...e5!

Another typical theme; once ...d5 and ...b5 are stopped, a timely ...e5 allows ...b5 to be played, after all.

23 ♘c2 b5! 24 cxb5 ♘cxe4! 25 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 26 ♙d3?!

Black's point is shown by 26 ♙xe4 ♙xc2!. The best move is 26 ♙e3, when 26... ♘f6 27 bxa6 ♙xa6 28 ♙ed2 d5 might follow, with Black better.

26... ♘c5! 27 ♙xd6?? ♙ed8 0-1

White's 27th was a blunder, but otherwise ...axb5 would have given Black a decisive edge.

Needless to say, we have only scratched the surface of a topic so broad as 'dynamism'. But it is perhaps the best descriptive term we have for the widely-acknowledged increase in the sharpness of play which began with Alekhine and continues today. In the next chapter, we discuss a concept closely related to dynamism: the role of time in modern chess.

11 Time and Information

In this chapter, we investigate a rather abstract-sounding issue: the role of time in chess. I will discuss ‘time’ in the limited sense of tempi, i.e., the number of moves at one’s disposal to, for example, carry out a plan. The interesting and controversial aspect of this subject has to do with the value of a single tempo; this has special relevance to symmetrical positions and reversed openings, as we shall see. Furthermore, the value of tempi ties into the discussion of ‘latent dynamism’ in the last chapter. The extent of a position’s dynamic potential is dependent upon the time available to realize that potential, as well as to the ability to react to changes in the opponent’s position (elasticity). In all these cases, there is a trade-off between the benefits of extra moves and the additional information the opponent gleans from them, which leads us to our first topic.

Information Theory and Chess

Let’s begin with the very first move, and in particular, with this question: is White better in chess? At first glance, this is rather silly; after all White maintained a 56%/44% winning percentage for most of the century (this fairly recently slipped to 55%/45%, to be sure). But it is also true that some of the world’s top players have scored brilliantly with Black. Fischer is said to have commented that his big breakthrough in chess came when he became aware of Black’s genuine winning chances. Also, whether a player actually feels that White is better to some extent depends upon his attitude. Certainly it’s hard to believe that Kasparov enters systems such the King’s Indian, Grünfeld, and Sicilian Defences as Black thinking: “Of course I’m worse to begin with, so it will take some bad moves by my opponent for me to equalize.” More likely, he and other attacking players bypass the question by thinking in terms of the concrete nature of the dynamic imbalance on the board, and seeking to seize the initiative whenever possible.

It is with this in mind that we come to a discussion of time, and of what worth a tempo is in the opening. In his marvellous book *Dynamic Chess Strategy*, Suba has a chapter entitled ‘Black is Winning After All!’. He tries to justify this outrageous thesis by means of what he calls a ‘childish joke’, the joke being:

Child 1: ‘Say a number’

Child 2: ‘16’

Child 1: ‘17, I win!’

Suba explains: “Chess is a game of complete information, and Black’s information is always greater – by one move!”. Of course, even Suba himself scores better with White than with Black, but this information-theoretic point of view is actually quite relevant to chess and explanatory of some of its paradoxes. Classical chess theory has traditionally ignored the negative qualities of having the move. The assumption has always been that specific moves may have drawbacks, not that the general obligation to make a move has drawbacks! But modern theory acknowledges this fact in several respects. Later in this chapter, for example, I will discuss why so many reversed openings tend to be uninteresting or even inferior for the side playing with an extra tempo. Essentially, the extra move allows the defender to adjust in advance to his opponent’s plans. This is Suba’s main point; chess is a reactive game, in which all moves are committal and thus in some sense helpful to the opponent. It is interesting in this context to consider just what White would do on his first move if he wanted to ‘play Black’ with an extra tempo. The fact is that chess moves are not just ‘tempi’; they generally contain disadvantages as well. This is obvious with moves like 1 a4 or 1 h4, which are explicitly weakening; but even a modest move such as 1 a3, which proves useful in so many black openings, is also committal, in that queenside castling will be less attractive, and if White ever moves his c-pawn, there can be slight weaknesses on queenside light squares like b3. It’s also not too difficult for Black, with his lead in

information, to find openings in which the move a3 is either useless or out-of-place. The reply 1...g6 makes a good start in that direction.

In many openings, Black indeed benefits from knowing his opponent's plans. For example, Suba points out that in the classical variation of the Scheveningen Sicilian (1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♕f6 5 ♘c3 e6, or 5...a6 followed by 6...e6), Black tends to wait until White's light-squared bishop moves before he decides upon the best position for his b8-knight. If that bishop goes to g2 or f3 (via e2), he says, then c6 tends to be the best square; but if the bishop is developed on d3 or c4, then ...♘d7 tends to be more appropriate. One can come up with similar mini-rules in many unbalanced openings and even in symmetrical ones (see below).

Of course, one can also carry things too far. Not all information is useful; for example, it doesn't help you to know that you are facing unavoidable mate; and even knowledge that your opponent is trying to force weaknesses in your position may not be enough to prevent him from succeeding. I would propose another children's game as a better metaphor for certain positions in chess: the race to the telephone pole. Child 1 gets a head start; Child 2 is intellectually precocious, but unfortunately, no faster than his friend. Then the conversation goes:

Child 1: 'OK, I'm off!' [runs towards the pole]

Child 2 [does the same, after a delay]: 'Me too, **and** I know where you're going!'

Child 1 [reaching pole first]: 'Big deal. I win!'

Child 2: 'Yes, but I know more about the route you've taken than you know about mine!'

Child 1: 'Who cares? I won!' [and walks away muttering: "You're weird."]

This is fundamentally the problem with the extreme version of Suba's argument (the 'Black is better' part). Some chess positions are more linear, in that an extra tempo merely brings one closer to the finish line; whereas others are characterized by interdependent infighting, such that the knowledge of the opponent's last move is indeed almost worth the tempo he has gained from it. Taking this into account, we might suggest (as Suba does) that Black play unbalanced structures with great potential for reaction.

Indeed, as we have noted elsewhere (Chapter 3, in the section about backward pawns), Suba's favourite Sicilian Defence ...d6/...e6 structure scores better for Black than other defences to 1 e4, perhaps suggesting that Black's 'lead' in information really is of some use in the appropriate positions. This is the kind of issue that bears watching as chess evolves.

Remis?

While we're more or less on the subject, what is the proper result of a perfectly played chess game? As you probably already know, it is a draw. There is no need to wait for computers to solve chess in order to understand this; it is crystal clear from a study of theory. Of course, I can't prove this, but I doubt that you can find a single strong player who would disagree. For those who like authoritative sources, I remember Kasparov, after a last-round draw, explaining to the waiting reporters: 'Well, chess is a draw.' If one of the most dynamic players in history (with the highest winning percentage of his time) believes this, we can probably assume that it's true. And yet, how many sources simply neglect to address this subject! One feels that they don't want to present chess as a boring game which is only made competitive by human error. But for one thing, even 'perfect' play can result in games which, however well-played, are characterized by wild shifts in momentum; see the next chapter for a discussion of the swings of initiative which mark dynamically-balanced chess games. Moreover, any number of positions assessed as 'equal' in books are so unbalanced and complex as to make that assessment only a guide to one's practical chances. Tal once remarked that most of the '=' assessments in opening books were actually '≠'! As an author of opening books, I know what he means. Because of the presumption of White being better, the juncture of the game at which Black frees his game or neutralizes White's plans has often automatically been assumed to give him equality, even though in dynamic openings, the exhaustion of White's initiative very often means that Black has seized it with advantage.

This brings up the notion of 'arithmeticism' in chess. Especially with the appearance of

chess-playing computers which update a numerical assessment of the position on every half-move, there are players who tend to think in terms of arithmetic advantages, e.g., 'White is better by 0.33 pawns'. This has its uses, but can lead to a rather artificial view of the game. What happens when both sides make a few moves which are the best ones, and suddenly the 0.33 pawns is down to 0.00, or full equality? The defender of this point of view will say: 'Well, I didn't see far enough ahead. If I had, I would have accurately assessed the original position as 0.00.' The only problem with this point of view is that chess is a draw, and all kinds of clear advantages (in the sense of having a good probability of winning a position in a practical game) are insufficient to force a win against perfect defence. So most positions would be assessed as 0.00, which is not very helpful. In the extreme, we have the same problem when we claim, for example, that 1 f3 is 'better' than 1 e4 , or 1 d4 is better than 1 c4 . These are rather meaningless statements, unless we put them in the context of 'better against opponent X' or 'better from the standpoint of achieving good results with the least study' or some such. As for the objective claim of superiority, what would be our criterion? I would suggest that only if a given first move consistently performs better than others against all levels of competition might we designate it as 'better' in a practical sense. Since all reasonable first moves lead to a draw with perfect play, a claim of ultimate theoretical superiority for one of them cannot be justified.

Time and Reversed Openings

The relative effectiveness of various reversed openings is a complex subject. Students are often irritated, for example, that everyone has such difficulties playing as White against a Sicilian Defence (1 e4 c5), but that leading masters have no qualms about answering 1 c4 with 1... e5 . Similarly, the Dutch Defence looks particularly sterile when White achieves the reversed positions a tempo up (it turns out that he has nothing useful to do!); and indeed, many standard black openings are not very inspiring when one gets them as White, tempo in hand. This is where Suba's information-theoretic

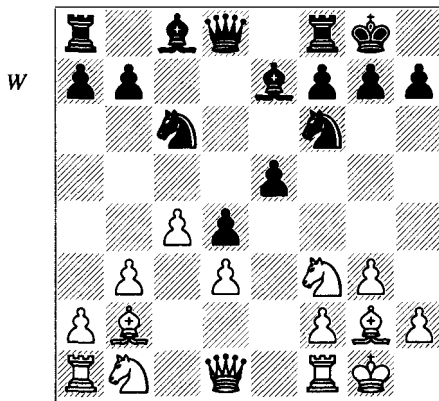
viewpoint really comes into its own. We have already mentioned two reasons for White's disappointment:

a) most moves have disadvantages as well as advantages, so an extra move is not always an unqualified blessing;

b) with his extra information about what White is doing, Black can better react to the new situation.

A third reason is simple, but also important: because he feels the obligation of playing for a win, White will often not be satisfied with a move which clearly equalizes, but allows a type of drawish simplification. Black in the same position may feel no compunction about entering into that simplification, since a draw with Black is considered an acceptable result.

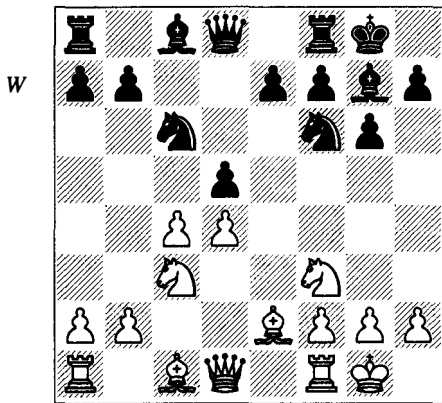
Let's begin with some simple examples. The Modern Benoni, 1 d4 f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 f3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 , is a dynamic and dangerous weapon for Black. Wouldn't White like to get the same kind of chances a full tempo up? But after 1 f3 d5 2 c4 d4 , Black already knows what White is up to. He won't therefore oblige White after 3 e3 with 3... c5 , but rather play simply 3... c6 , which has long been considered equal. Similarly, 3 g3 can be answered by 3... c6 4 g2 e5 . Another reversed Benoni situation arises after 1 f3 d5 2 c4 e6 3 b3 c5 4 g3 c6 5 g2 f6 6 0-0 e7 7 b2 0-0 8 d3 d4 9 e3 (9 e4 is more promising, but that's another story) 9... e5 10 exd4 , and now 10... exd4 is fine, but the surprising thing is that Black can also play 10... cxd4 ? (D).



Black is two full tempi behind the white side of the main-line Benoni which goes 1 d4 f6 2

c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♖c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 ♜f3 ♙g7 8 ♙e2 0-0 9 0-0: one tempo for being Black, and another for playing ...e6-e5 instead of ...e5 in one move. And yet his position is fine! Why? Because White's bishop on b2, developed, is worse than it would be on c1, undeveloped! On b2, it gets in the way of ♖b1 and b4 (Black's main plan in the reversed position is ...♖b8 and ...b5), it is not able to go to g5 (again, in the reversed position, the most effective deployment for the c8-bishop is on g4), and it doesn't even support an f4 advance, which sometimes arises in the reversed position. In fact, White may even want to play 11 ♙c1 in the diagrammed position! One could say that Black's extra information – that the bishop was already committed to b2 – allowed him to play ...d4 with confidence.

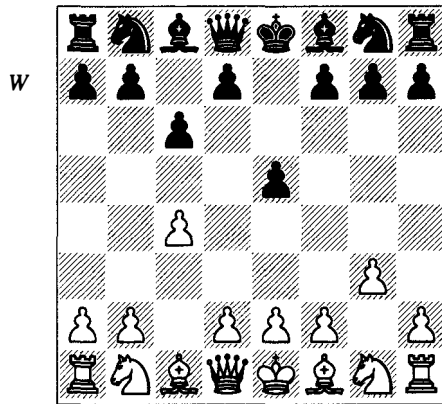
Sometimes, defences are simply too associated with equalizing ideas to be useful with colours reversed. Thus, for example, the Pirc Defence Reversed after 1 g3 e5 2 ♙g2 d5 3 d3 ♜f6 4 ♜f3 ♜c6 has never been considered a good weapon for White, although of course he is not worse, since the equalizing e4 will be easy to play. Other defences are generally thought of as dynamic, but turn out to be surprisingly reactive in nature. A typical example is the Tarrasch Defence to the Queen's Gambit Declined. This dynamic black weapon when played by Spassky or Kasparov seems a bit mushy when played by White a tempo up, e.g., 1 ♜f3 c5 2 c4 g6 3 ♜c3 ♙g7 4 e3 ♜f6 5 d4 cxd4 6 exd4 d5 7 ♙e2 0-0 8 0-0 ♜c6 (D).



Although White has moderately useful moves such as 9 ♙e1 or 9 h3 at his disposal, this

position is already fully equal for Black. With the same opening moves, similarly, the reversed English Opening position with 6 ♜xd4 0-0 7 ♙e2 d5 promises nothing for the first player. And White has many opportunities to get Grünfeld positions a tempo up, but theory indicates that there is little he can do with them (note that this does not include the Exchange Grünfeld, which would indeed be very nice to have with an extra tempo!).

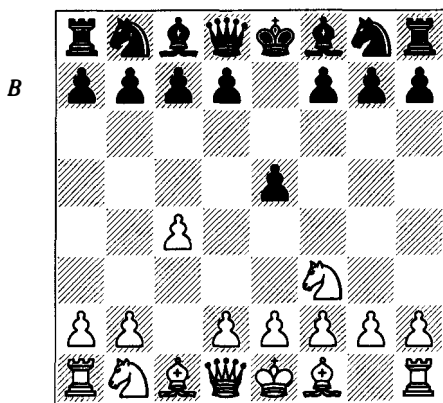
Let's examine the relationship of time to information by taking an in-depth look at that 1 c4 e5 case. White's goal is to play a Sicilian Defence with a tempo more. Suppose that he starts with 2 g3, aiming for, say, a Dragon or Accelerated Fianchetto reversed. As it happens, Black can simply go along with this and play 2...♜f6 3 ♙g2 d5 4 cxd5 ♜xd5 5 ♜c3 ♜b6 6 ♜f3 ♜c6 with a Classical Dragon reversed; top GMs defend this position all the time. But Black can also use his extra information – that White is committed to g3 – and play 2...c6 (D).



Now 3 ♙g2 d5 grabs the centre, e.g., 4 cxd5 cxd5 5 ♜f3 ♜c6 6 d3 ♜f6 with equality. White can instead play in the same way that Black does versus 1 e4 c5 2 c3, i.e., (from the diagram) 3 ♜f3 e4 4 ♜d4 – what then? The answer is that after 4...d5 5 cxd5 ♜xd5!, Black takes advantage of the extra g3 move: 6 ♜c2 (6 e3 shows the drawback having an extra move, as g3 creates light-square weaknesses; play might go 6...♜f6 7 ♜c3 ♜e5 8 ♙g2 ♜a6!? 9 d3 ♙g4 or 9...♜c5, with easy equality) 6...♜f6 7 ♜c3 ♜h5. This is known to be fine for Black, e.g., 8 h3 (8 ♙g2 ♙h3!) 8...♜g6 9 ♙g2 ♙d6 10 ♜e3 0-0 11 ♜c2 ♜e8 Shamkovich-Baumbach, USSR

1970. Nor is 2 g3 the greatest of moves in the line $2...c6 \ 3 \ d4 \ exd4 \ 4 \ \text{Wxd4} \ d5 \ 5 \ \text{Bg2} \ \text{Qf6}$, when theory shows Black achieving equality (although this is certainly interesting enough for both sides).

What other second moves might White try? How about trying a Nimzowitsch Sicilian ($1 \ e4 \ c5 \ 2 \ \text{Qf3} \ \text{Qf6}$) reversed, by $1 \ c4 \ e5 \ 2 \ \text{Qf3} \ (D)$?



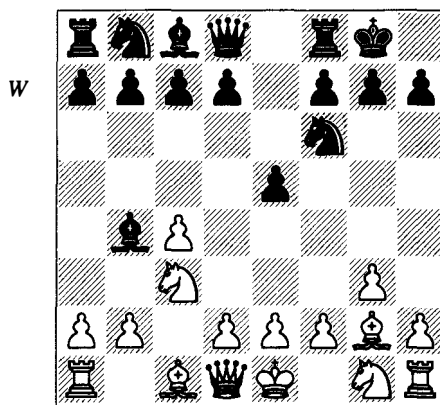
As so often, the lack of a move for Black can actually be to his advantage. For example, in the normal, unreversed, position, the main line goes $3 \ e5 \ \text{Qd5} \ 4 \ \text{Qc3} \ e6 \ 5 \ \text{Qxd5} \ exd5$ with dynamic play. But in the reversed position, Black has (from the diagram) $2...e4 \ 3 \ \text{Qd4} \ \text{Qc6} \ 4 \ e3 \ \text{Qxd4} \ 5 \ exd4 \ \text{Wf6!}$ (the reward for *not* having $...Qf6$ in!), e.g., $6 \ d5 \ \text{Ac5} \ 7 \ \text{We2} \ \text{Wg6} \ 8 \ \text{Qc3} \ \text{Qf6} \ 9 \ d3 \ 0-0 \ 10 \ dxe4 \ \text{Qg4} \ 11 \ \text{Qd1} \ d6 \ 12 \ f3 \ \text{Qe5}$ intending $...f5$, Murey-Udov, Moscow 1966. Black has very promising play for a pawn.

What about a nice innocuous move like $1 \ c4 \ e5 \ 2 \ d3$ instead? Dragon and Najdorf players may perk up their ears here, but they will be disappointed if Black plays $2...c6$ with the idea $...d5$, for example, $3 \ \text{Qf3} \ d6 \ 4 \ \text{Qc3} \ f5$ (note again the advantage of *not* having $...Qf6$ in). This is a typical structure in which White would probably rather have his pawns on $e3$ and $d4$ and his king's knight on $e2$. Now, however, $d4$ can only come in two steps, negating White's advantage. It turns out that $2 \ d3$ is rather committal after all.

Well, then, what about $1 \ c4 \ e5 \ 2 \ \text{Qc3} \ \text{Qf6} \ 3 \ g3$ as another try? Again, a simple response is Keres's $3...c6$, when the main line runs $4 \ \text{Qf3}$ (else $4...d5$) $4...e4 \ 5 \ \text{Qd4} \ d5 \ 6 \ cxd5 \ \text{Wb6!} \ 7 \ \text{Qb3} \ cxd5 \ 8 \ \text{Bg2} \ \text{Bf5} \ 9 \ d3 \ \text{Bb4}$, and as far as I

know, this position is still considered dynamically equal. Again, White has not succeeded in simply reversing a normal Sicilian.

Probably even more convincing for Black is a Rossolimo Sicilian Reversed, i.e., $1 \ c4 \ e5 \ 2 \ \text{Qc3} \ \text{Qf6} \ 3 \ g3 \ \text{Bb4} \ 4 \ \text{Bg2} \ 0-0 \ (D)$.



An amusing position! In the reversed (Sicilian) case, it would be 'Black's' move here. So let's give Black an extra tempo in our imagination. Then the normal plans for him would be:

- $...c6$, when White could respond with Qf3! ;
- $...Qc6$, which among other things allows Qd5! ;
- $...d6$, which has several answers, including Qf3 ; and
- $...Be8$, which is often answered by $e4$.

But it's actually White's move, and it's too early for him to expect an advantage from moves which are mainly responsive in nature. In the diagram, for example, if White plays $5 \ d3$, he runs into the surprisingly dangerous $5...c6!$, threatening $6...d5$, e.g., $6 \ \text{Bd2?!} \ d5 \ 7 \ \text{Wb3} \ \text{Qa6!} \ 8 \ cxd5 \ cxd5 \ 9 \ \text{Qxd5} \ \text{Bxd2+}$ and $10...Qc5$ with obvious compensation; or $6 \ \text{Wb3} \ \text{Qa6!} \ 7 \ \text{Qf3} \ (7 \ e4? \ \text{Qc5!}) \ 7...e4 \ 8 \ \text{Qd4} \ exd3 \ 9 \ exd3 \ \text{Qc5!} \ 10 \ \text{Wc2} \ d5$, etc. (analysis by Kapengut). And a move like $5 \ \text{Qd5}$ is truly harmless when $5...Qxd5 \ 6 \ cxd5$ doesn't even attack a knight on $c6$. If White plays an immediate $5 \ e4$, Black has the dynamic riposte $5...Bxc3! \ 6 \ bxc3 \ (6 \ dxc3 \ d6 \text{ is known to be equal; that is fine for Black, but for White?}) \ 6...c6! \ 7 \ \text{Qe2} \ d5 \ 8 \ cxd5 \ cxd5 \ 9 \ exd5 \ \text{Qxd5} \ 10 \ 0-0 \ \text{Qc6}$ and White's centre and light squares are weak. We looked at this last position in Chapter 7 (in the section 'Reversing

the Conventional Wisdom'). This leaves 5 Qf3 , when Black can transpose to a known main line after 5... Qc6 , still avoiding a reversed Sicilian, or he can try the more flexible 5... Re8 6 0-0 c6!?

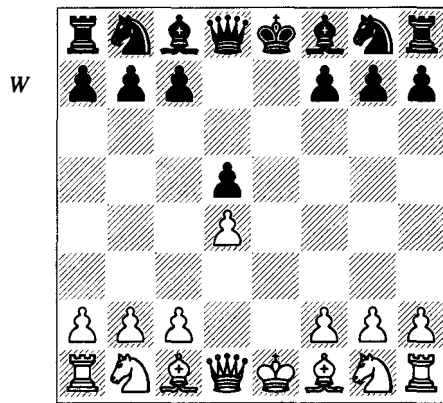
The point is, Black's set-up in the Sicilian is fine as a reactive system, but not worth much when trying to claim the initiative as White. This is true because Black is able to react to the specific plan White chooses; in Suba's terms, his information is indeed a move greater! Furthermore, he is able to take advantage of dead equal positions which White (hoping to retain the advantage of the first move) would normally avoid. Before leaving this subject, let me just point to (without actually analysing) a last example after the same 1 c4 e5: 2 Qc3 Qc6 3 g3 g6 4 Qg2 Qg7 . The reader will recognize this as a Closed Sicilian Reversed. But whereas the Closed Sicilian is not very popular for White, and is considered easy for Black to defend against, the Closed Sicilian Reversed is a vital and popular system for Black, despite him being a tempo down! Why? Well, to some extent, he can breathe easily because of his opponent's obligation to move! Moves like 5 Bb1 , 5 e4, 5 e3 and 5 Qf3 commit White to a certain development and make it relatively easy for Black to respond accordingly. White can defer a decision by 5 d3, but after 5...d6, he must tip his hand anyway, e.g., by 6 e4, 6 Bb1 , 6 e3 or 6 Qf3 . Even the seemingly non-committal 6 Qd2 forfeits the chance for Qb2 and weakens support for a later d4. This is not an openings manual, but the patient student can learn a lot about how reversed openings work by using standard references and comparing each of these 5th and 6th moves with the analogous Closed Sicilian variations.

Today's Symmetry is Tomorrow's Opportunity

The subject of symmetrical openings is a huge one, but I just want to make some simple points about time and information. As so often, Nimzowitsch had advanced insight into this issue. In *Chess Praxis*, under the heading "Asymmetric Treatment of Symmetrical Positions", he introduces the subject historically: "Followers of the

so-called classic school had a marked preference, which is today difficult to understand, for symmetrical variations. Not only that, but they managed to surround this unpleasing circumstance with a scientific cloak. The belief gained ground that many positions and openings had a natural tendency towards symmetry, and that it would be sacrificing the intellect to wish to avoid this heaven-sent gift..."

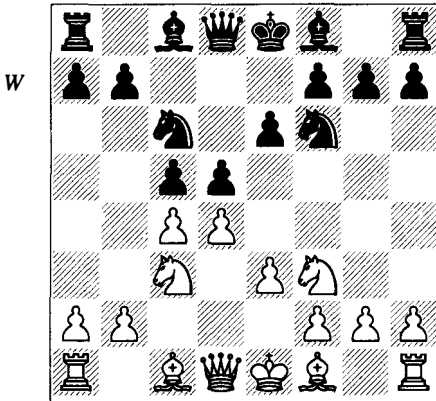
Nimzowitsch then examines the French Defence Exchange Variation after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 (D).



He claims that if White puts his king's knight on f3, that Black should put his king's knight on e7, and vice-versa (Qe2 is met by ... Qf6). In fact, Nimzowitsch won several games in which he followed the first policy (answering Qf3 with ... Qe7). He was truly ahead of his time in this regard. Modern players of the French Defence have little difficulty unbalancing the position in this variation. Just for example, Black can react to 4 Qc3 with 4... Qb4 or 4...c6, he can answer 4 Qd3 with 4... Qc6 or 4...c5, and he can respond to 4 Qf3 with 4... Qg4 or 4... Qd6 . In the latter case (after 4 Qf3 Qd6), 5 Qd3 Qe7 (or 5... Qg4), 5 c4 c6 6 Qc3 Qe7 , and 5 Qc3 c6 are all asymmetrical positions with sufficient tension to ensure a full-fledged struggle.

Here again we see a case where the 'Black has more information' thesis applies unambiguously; in each of the above examples, Black responds to White's committal move with an answer designed to frustrate its intent. In modern chess, this early attempt to unbalance is characteristic of the commonly-played symmetrical positions. In the Slav Defence, after 1

d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 cxd5 cxd5 4 ♖f3 ♖f6 5 ♖c3 ♖c6 6 ♗f4, for example, 6...a6 is a popular move. Another case in point is seen in the Semi-Tarrasch Defence, after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♖f3 ♖f6 4 ♖c3 c5 5 e3 ♖c6 (D) (or a number of other move-orders).



As Nimzowitsch himself complained, innumerable games before him went 6 ♗d3 ♗d6 at this point; his own suggestion was at least to play 6...♗e7, in order to maintain Black's pressure along the d-file. But modern play takes carefully into consideration the committal nature of making a move. 6 ♗d3 is not at all popular today, for the simple reason that the bishop has to move twice to capture on c4, e.g., after 6...cxd4 7 exd4 dxc4 8 ♗xc4 ♗e7, and Black has achieved an asymmetrical isolated queen's pawn position similar to the Queen's Gambit Accepted, but a full tempo up (due to ♗f1-d3xc4, which occurs in one move in the QGA).

What does White therefore do in the diagram? Normally, one of two things. He can play 6 cxd5 himself, but this leaves Black the choice of two sound moves: 6...exd5 and 6...♖xd5; in

the latter case, White is once again likely to end up with an isolated queen's pawn after ...cxd4/exd4. That results in a complex and interesting game, pitting White's active piece play versus Black's blockade of the potentially weak (in the long term) d4-pawn. White's other move is perhaps more typical still: he wants to make the most useful move which nevertheless doesn't lose time (like 6 ♗d3) or give his opponent too much 'information' (like 6 cxd5). Such a move, also known as 'a useful waiting move', is 6 a3. Then if Black plays 6...♗d6, White can not only gain time by 7 dxc5, but after 7...♗xc5, 8 b4 may be a useful way of preparing quick development by ♗b2. Or if Black plays (6 a3) 6...cxd4 7 exd4 dxc4!? 8 ♗xc4, the move a3 is known to be quite useful in such positions (it provides a convenient retreat for the bishop on a2 and prepares ♗d3 without allowing the reply ...♖b4, among other things). For this reason, 6...cxd4 7 exd4 ♗e7 makes more sense. But Black can also answer 6 a3 with the unbalancing 6...♖e4, or he can continue the symmetry for one more move by 6...a6, and only unbalance things on the next move.

The lesson here, and in other symmetrical openings, is that at many junctures, Black can choose to utilize the information given him by White's extra move to create an unbalanced and by no means inferior position. He tends to do this at an early stage. Seldom does one see the prolonged copycatting that Nimzowitsch bemoaned in his day.

In conclusion, modern dynamism with the black pieces stems in part from Black's ability to use his greater information. To the extent that Black can play asymmetric openings with a lot of tension, the advantage of the first move may be at least partially compensated for.

12 The Initiative Dance: Some Musings

Chess would be an easy game if there were a set of guidelines which one could absorb to master the game. Since that isn't the case, players everywhere wonder about what separates the club player from the master, the master from the grandmaster, and even the 'average grandmaster' from the world champion. I have neither the knowledge nor inclination to answer such questions in any detail, but I would like to speculate briefly in order to introduce this chapter's topic. My own feeling is that the most important factor which differentiates experienced players from each other is their ability to calculate well, which includes the ability to visualize and assess positions accurately. That, in turn, is closely connected with advanced pattern-recognition skills and a good memory. The player who can see further into the position and accurately assess what's happening, whether tactically or positionally, tends to be the better player. There are, to be sure, other important determinants such as ability to concentrate fully for extended periods of time, fighting spirit, work ethic, and the like. But having the ability to visualize positions accurately (a major part of calculation), and being able to draw on an enormous bank of patterns and positions in a clear and useful way tend to be the most important determinants of what we call chess talent. From what has been written about this subject (and from the experience of prodigies, for example), I think a case can be made that those skills are to a large extent innate; or at least they must be learned at a very early age.

Nevertheless, there are types of chess thought not fully tied in with calculation and visualization which also play an important role. Players and writers are notoriously vague about abilities in this realm, using words such as 'intuition', 'creativity', and 'imagination', for example. In practical terms, the most common and important test of such qualities arises when players must calculate to a certain depth in a

position and then simply make an intuitive judgement about whether the resulting situation will be favourable or not. A strong player, for example, may be skilled at estimating with high probability whether a position will be good for him, whereas a grandmaster may also have the ability to see unusual tactical shots at the end of a calculation, in just that one branch of analysis which he 'happens' to extend a bit further than the others. In their notes to games, good players talk a lot about just 'feeling' whether a possible attacking variation would win out in the end or not. It seems to me that the ability to make such judgements depends upon recognizing critical moments of a game, and even more importantly, understanding the swings of momentum which occur in any given contest. I'd like to look at some interpretations of those swings here.

The Mysteries of Momentum: What is an Advantage?

Modern chess writers have made the point that there are various kinds of initiative. The one which appeals best to our 'arithmetical' understanding is when one side is attacking, and in a step-by-step fashion, that initiative is finally converted into a combination. Suetin calls this kind of initiative 'gradually ripening'. But Romanovsky makes the point that "the initiative will quite often bear a temporary character: it either runs dry or is intercepted by the opposing side." Now by the initiative 'running dry', we can presume he means that one side's activity and threats cease without the other's taking over. But how typical is this situation? It seems to me that the reality is more like Tal's comments in the last chapter about Black equalizing, i.e., that when Black 'equalizes', he is usually better. Or as Réti says about the attack: "once [it] is repulsed, the counterattack is

usually decisive". Similarly, I feel, the loss of initiative by one side is very often accompanied by its adoption by the other side.

So it's fair to say, as a starting point, that shifts in momentum (or the lack of them) don't seem to follow any set pattern. Here's how I would describe the three 'model' situations: In an exceptional game, one side has an initiative, develops it over the course of 15-25 moves, and finally coverts it into a winning attack or end-game. Kasparov seems particularly brilliant at finding positions in which the initiative never peters out, and I remember that the German GM Uhlmann at his peak was also quite adept at this – it was as though the opponent never had a chance to squirm out. Then there are some games in which one side has the initiative, the other side neutralizes it, and the game is quickly drawn. But in a typically complex modern struggle between two equally matched opponents, it seems to me that the struggle is often characterized by a handing back and forth of initiative, mutual threats, and unclear tension. Suba makes some excellent observations about this issue. He begins by discussing the overall idea of 'the advantage':

"The advantage in chess does not seem to obey the rules of simple logic. Two good moves do not necessarily make a good pair. An attacking move which forces a retreating move in reply does not always give any advantage, or increase an existing one. Sometimes such 'ply' may even do damage to a favourable balance of the initiative or some other sort of advantage ... There is a sort of coil-spring defensive potential which must be considered a factor. It is a form of dynamic potential [Suba's term which we discussed in Chapter 10 – JW] and shows that, paradoxically, the latter can sometimes be improved by a retreating move". Note how this is consistent with our discussion of tempi and 'information' in the last chapter.

Applying this model to the concept of the initiative, Suba provides us the following conversation between the Fan ('F') and the Master ('M'):

"F: Do you think that initiative is a part of dynamism as well?

M: No, I think that initiative is just an exterior aspect of dynamism. It is a continuous consumption and regeneration of dynamism, and a

change in the balance of these two elements may jeopardize potential.

F: Is that why sometimes you lose the initiative without any logical explanation?

M: Yes. Sometimes you must lose it, just like that. If you try to cling to it, by forcing the issue, your dynamic potential will become exhausted and you won't be able to face a vigorous counterattack."

Now, if the last two chapters dealt with relatively unproveable abstractions, this kind of talk seems to be approaching mysticism, or at least, some chess equivalent of Continental Metaphysics! But I think the open-minded reader will admit that, however unscientific and even exotic these comments are, they also ring true as a description of our personal chess experience. Haven't we all felt this 'coil-spring defensive potential' in a position, and doesn't the Master's explanation of losing the initiative and trying to cling to it too long correspond to many of our own games? What's more, don't these ideas apply to many of the games of even the best players of our day? I think that we resist such concepts because:

a) they aren't all that useful in improving our own play: after all, it's easier to examine a potential course of action carefully and then make our best possible assessment about it than it is to try to figure out which kind of initiative we've been handed, or how 'coily' our opponent's defensive springs are!

b) that familiar arithmetical model has a powerful influence on us: if I'm 'better' for a certain number of moves, by a certain 'amount' (say, a half of a pawn), then it's absurd that suddenly I'm faced with a situation in which I can't even equalize! Of course, this means that I've made a mistake somewhere; but the seeming irrationality of the situation arises when after a series of perfectly logical and harmless moves, we can't even cash in our half pawn for equality, but rather have to watch in horror as the opponent's counter-initiative unfolds and threatens to sweep us off the board entirely! And then, graciously, we find that after another 5 or 6 of our own semi-desperate defensive moves, our *opponent* runs out of ideas, and suddenly (also without having seemingly done anything wrong) stands worse again!

Of course, to an ultra-logical critic, this may

just sound like the ravings of a weak player. That critic might object: "Look, it all just seems irrational to you because you aren't strong enough to see into the position clearly, or you simply can't calculate far enough." But that objection is a bit specious; using the same reasoning, why should we ever attempt to talk about chess in theoretical terms at all? It is never possible to assess arithmetically all of the elements of a complex position and take into account all future possibilities; even if a computer were ultimately able to do the equivalent of this, it would do so by essentially performing a brute-force search on *all* future moves, not by adding up theoretical advantages and disadvantages. To me, the proof that Suba's model reflects something very real about chess (putting aside the question of its usefulness) is that we have here a description of not just the typical 1800 player's adventures in the local club championship, but also of the fantastic and convoluted battles which the world's top ten players fairly regularly engage in! In particular, if you recall our several discussions of the complex and dynamically-balanced modern openings which characterize top-flight chess, you will recall the remarkable length of time during which the advantage and initiative seems to swing back and forth. This not only happens in some theoretical sense, but in the minds of our best players, who make this dynamic give-and-take explicit in the notes to their own games, and in post-mortems.

Dynamism and Provocation

The above comments are meant to give a picture of the paradoxical nature of momentum and initiative. In modern openings, both White and Black try to find positions in which they cede to their opponents apparent advantages (often the attack or initiative), knowing that such advantages can be neutralized, in return for positional gains or counterattack. The resulting positions tend to be unfavourable to the side with the failed attack, because the other player either gains long-term positional advantages or himself assumes the initiative. This might be called a strategy of long-term provocation, in that the opponent is invited to take apparently promising, but ultimately committal, steps.

In the most general sense, this describes the essence of numerous dynamic modern defences for Black. In many of the main lines of major defences like the various Sicilians, the French, the Modern Benoni, and the Grünfeld, for example, White can get both the initiative (normally via spatial preponderance and/or a lead in development) and attacking chances, whereas Black often holds long-term positional and counter-attacking trumps. The trick is to find variations in which the initiative or attack peters out and passes back to Black. We have already seen such ideas in the Poisoned Pawn Variation of the Najdorf Sicilian, for example, and in our discussion of 'mega-centre' openings such as the Four Pawns Attack versus the Benoni or the radical pawn-storms against the Grünfeld Exchange Variation. But even calmer main-line Open Sicilians and Grünfelds have the irritating tendency to leave Black with a nice queenside attack and open c-file in an ending, so White generally has to transform the pawn structure before that arises. Similarly, Modern Benoni endings are often characterized by a position where Black's queenside pawns come rushing down the board by ...b5, ...c4, and b4, for example; so in games with that opening as well, White has a tendency either to attack or to transform the pawn structure during the middlegame. In such cases, if White attacks by rushing his pawns forward to open lines against the king, the failure of that attack will more often than not lead to an effective counter-initiative by Black, as the reader has probably experienced.

This sort of dynamic resiliency in openings like the Sicilian is pretty well-known, but what about from the white side? It seems to me that a lot of modern openings feature something similar by White. He plays for positional gains (in some case, merely 'the accumulation of small advantages'!), but in doing so, provokes Black to counter actively by attacking or, at least, seizing an initiative. White's hope is that when that attack fails or the initiative peters out, he will be left with either a permanent positional advantage or an attack of his own. As an example, recall how, in our overview of the 4 ♖c2 Nimzo-Indian in Chapter 7 (subsection 'c'), we saw lines where Black (with the knight-pair) went all-out in attack, whereas White possessed

the long-term advantage of the two bishops. White's provocative philosophy (confirmed by experience) was that *if* the attack failed, his counterattack and positional advantages would be decisive. Certainly many 1 c4 e5 variations of the English Opening are based on provoking an ultimately ineffective Black kingside attack (...f5/...g5), and the same thing might be said of the white side of the main lines of the Dutch Defence.

To conclude this chapter, let me point out a few games in other openings featuring this dynamic.

Kasparov – P. Nikolić

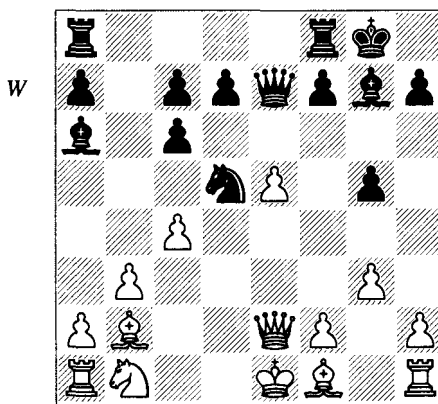
Linares 1997

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 exd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘xc6 bxc6 6 e5 ♖e7 7 ♗e2 ♘d5 8 c4 ♗a6 9 b3 g5!?

Black has a lead in development, and plays actively. One factor to be aware of, however, is that if he doesn't succeed in either attacking White or transforming the pawn structure, his three pawn islands and doubled pawns may leave him with a very poor ending. In the following case, when Black's activity fizzled, White's positional advantages were decisive: 9...g6 10 g3 ♗g7 and now Kasparov-I.Sokolov, Erevan Olympiad 1996 (by transposition) continued: 11 ♗b2 0-0 12 ♗g2 ♖fe8 13 0-0 ♘b6 14 ♗e1 d5 15 ♗c2! ♗ad8 16 ♘d2 ♗c5 17 ♗ac1 d4? (White is better regardless, but this is positional suicide) 18 ♘f3 d3 19 ♗d2 (better is 19 ♗c3! ♗c8 20 ♗cd1 ♗f5 21 h3 h5 22 ♘h4) 19...♗c8 20 h3 h5 21 ♗cd1 ♗f5 22 e6! ♗xe6 23 ♗xe6 ♗xe6 24 ♗xg7 ♗xg7 25 ♗c3+ ♗g8 26 ♗xd3 ♗xd3 27 ♗xd3 (the end of active play, so Black's pawn weaknesses will be decisive) 27...♘d7 28 ♗c3 ♗f5 29 ♘d4 ♗e5 30 ♗d2 c5 31 ♘f5 ♗xf5 32 ♗a5 ♘e5 33 ♗xa7 h4 34 ♗a8+ ♗g7 35 ♗e4 ♗f6 36 ♗xh4 1-0. This game illustrates the delicate balance between provocation and handing one's opponent a devastating attack. Because of this, the 'provocation strategy' is not to be entered into lightly; but you will find that provocation is in any case inherent in a number of modern counterattacking openings.

10 g3 ♗g7 11 ♗b2 0-0 (D)

12 ♘d2!?

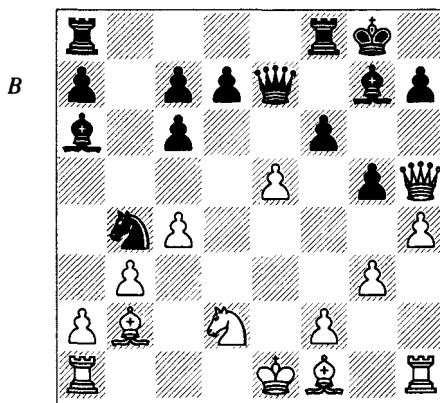


White's development is slow, and with this move, he even commits to leaving his king in the centre – a blatant provocation!

12...f6!?

Trying to open lines; Black feels that the ending after 13 exf6 ♗xf6 14 ♗xe7 ♘xe7 15 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 is approximately equal.

13 ♗h5! ♘b4 14 h4! (D)



Ironically, White launches an attack while underdeveloped, based on 14...♘c2+? 15 ♘d1 ♘xa1 16 hxg5. But the real point is to force simplification and exploit White's long-term advantages.

14...g4!

Kasparov's analysis of the main line after 14...♗e8 goes 15 ♗xe8 ♗axe8 16 0-0-0 ♘xa2+ 17 ♘b1 ♘b4 18 ♘e4 fxe5 19 ♗xd7! ♗c8 20 ♗xc7 ♗f5 21 ♗g2 ♘d3 22 ♗a3 with a clear advantage.

15 ♘d1 c5 16 a3 ♘c6?

White is better after 16...♗b7! 17 ♗g1 ♘c6 18 ♗d3 f5 19 ♗xf5 ♗xe5, but at least Black

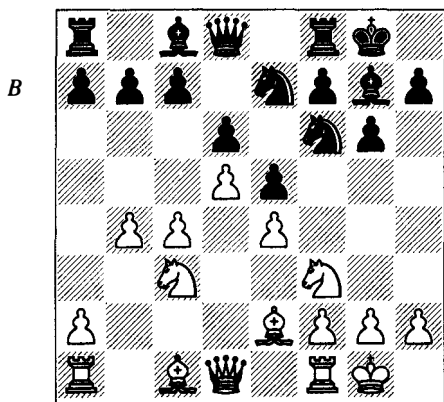
would be in the game. The text-move allows a forcing sequence which gives White a simple positional win.

17 ♖d3 f5 18 ♙xf5 ♙xe5 19 ♖e1 d6 20 ♙e4! ♙b7 21 ♗xg4+ ♗g7 22 ♙d5+ ♖h8 23 ♙xe5 dxe5 24 ♗xg7+ ♖xg7 25 ♙e4 ♖ad8 26 ♙xc5 ♙c8 27 ♖a2 1-0

Anand – Z. Almasi

FIDE KO World Ch, Groningen 1997

1 d4 ♘f6 2 ♘f3 g6 3 c4 ♙g7 4 ♘c3 0-0 5 e4 d6 6 ♙e2 e5 7 0-0 ♘c6 8 d5 ♙e7 9 b4 (D)



There's hardly a more common example of a 'provocative' white opening than the main lines of the King's Indian Defence. In most variations, including the one we are following, White turns his attention to opening files and establishing key squares on the queenside, which in the long run tends to be decisive. In doing so, he leaves himself open to a kingside attack by Black, beginning with the move ...f5 and often followed by ...f4, ...g5-g4, and the attempted massacre of White's king. As with the provocative openings employed by Black above (the Sicilian Defence, for example), if the attacker's strategy falters, he is usually in big trouble positionally, and he tends to lose most endings. Of course, what can happen to Black in the Sicilian can also happen to White in the King's Indian, i.e., the provocation is sometimes too severe, leading to an overwhelming attack by the side that has been provoked to do so!

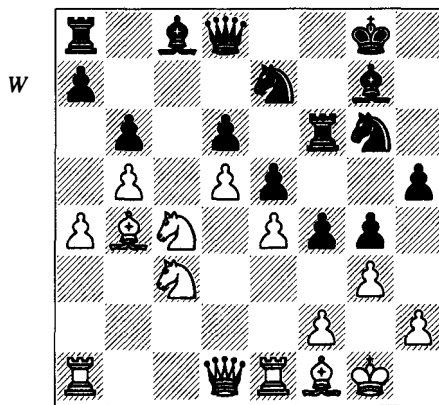
9...♘h5 10 ♖e1 ♘f4 11 ♙f1 h6

The line with 9 b4 and 10 ♖e1 is extremely popular just now; Kramnik, for example, has

had excellent results with it. As in variations with 9 ♙e1, Black attacks on the kingside, but White's pieces are better-placed for defence than in those lines. Very common at this point is 11...f5, but that allows 12 ♘g5 with the idea of ♙e6, which not only leaves White with a small positional edge on the light squares, but eliminates any fantasies Black might have of attacking on the kingside. 11...h6 tries to keep the attack alive, but is also rather slow and hasn't yet been very successful.

12 c5 g5 13 ♘d2 f5 14 g3 ♘f6 15 a4

This is probably more accurate than 15 ♘c4, when after 15...fxe4! 16 cxd6 (else he has to worry about ...dxc5 and ...♘xd5) 16...cxd6 17 ♘xe4 ♘f5 Black intends ...♘d4 in many lines. Black played differently in the following game, which, however, also shows how terribly difficult it is for him to scare up a real attack in this position, even with a lot of time to reorganize his forces: 15...f4 16 ♙a3 ♖f6 17 b5 b6 18 cxd6 cxd6 19 ♙b4 g4 20 a4 h5 (D).



21 a5 ♖b8 22 axb6 axb6 23 ♘b1! h4 24 ♘bd2 f3 25 ♘xd6 hxg3 26 hxg3 ♘f8 27 ♘c4 ♖h6 28 ♖a7 ♙d7 29 ♙c3 ♘c8 30 ♖xd7! ♘xd7 31 ♘f5 ♖h5 32 d6 ♗f6 33 ♘d5+ ♖h8 34 ♘ce3 ♗g6 35 ♙c4 ♗h7 36 ♘h4 ♘f6 37 d7 ♘xd5 38 d8 ♗+ ♗g8 39 ♗xg8+ ♖xg8 40 ♙xd5+ ♖h7 41 ♘g4 ♘d6 42 ♘xf3 ♘xb5 43 ♙f7 1-0 Izkuznykh-Fedorov, Omsk 1996.

15...f4

OK, so now Black has his standard attack. But as the game in the last note shows, that attack tends to run into a brick wall, leaving White his queenside advantage. In this game, Black falls victim to a rather easy tactic.

16 ♖c4 g4 17 ♜b5 ♜f6 18 ♜a3 h5??

Something like 18...♜h7 should have been tried, but after 19 ♜c1 a6 20 ♖c3, White's chances on the queenside are much better than Black's on the kingside, which have stalled. After 18...h5, White wins material and the game:

19 ♖xc7 ♜xc7 20 cxd6 ♜xd6 21 ♖xd6 ♜xd6 22 b5 ♜f6 23 d6 ♖f5 24 exf5 ♜xf5 25 ♜d5+ ♜h8 26 ♜ad1 ♜d8 27 ♜d3 ♜xd3 28 ♜xd3 h4 29 d7 hxg3 30 hxg3 f3 31 ♜c1 ♖f8 32 ♜e4 ♜e6 33 ♜a3 1-0

In this chapter, I have speculated about some rather hard-to-define and unproveable ideas

regarding the ebb-and-flow of dynamic struggles. To those interested in this topic, I would recommend examining contemporary games with these concepts in mind, and see if you feel that such ideas are helpful. I have included this discussion in my book mainly because I feel that this is the sort of area which will become increasingly important. Players who can get a feel for the paradoxical comings and goings of momentum and initiative, for example, will be well-armed for the type of chess contemporary masters engage in. And the correct use of provocation is a skill which separates the finest players from the rest of us.

13 The Modern Opening Reconsidered

In discussing advances in modern chess, I have tried throughout to mix complete games and middlegame positions with opening ideas. The latter have the benefit of being well-tested and familiar to the reader. Of course, as I have pointed out elsewhere, the distinction between the modern opening and middlegame has become increasingly blurred. Opening analysis can extend into the endgame, and routinely goes well beyond the older conception of the opening as the part of the game in which you 'get the pieces out'. I think that it's safe to say that the bulk of middlegame analysis done by modern players concerns itself with positions that are 'theoretical', in the sense that they either have arisen (or will arise) repeatedly in practice. In contrast, we used to study a famous position from, say, one of Pillsbury or Rubinstein's games, knowing full well that it would never occur again. Similarly, changes in the theory of positional and strategic play are often opening-theory-based, as will be clear to those who have made it through the book thus far. In view of all this, it would serve us well to take a final look at contemporary openings. Let's begin with some historical reflections.

The Paradox of Alekhine

Chess-players invest a lot of time and effort in mastering their craft, and like academics and scientists everywhere, they are naturally resistant to new ideas. In Chapter 2, we already cited a number of examples of narrow-minded dogmatism about opening ideas by great players such as Steinitz, Tarrasch, Réti, Nimzowitsch, Alekhine and Fine. Traditionally, experimentation with new concepts has been a double-edged sword, e.g., Steinitz arguably sacrificed more points than he gained by pushing his defensive/positional style to its limits. But in the realm of openings, new ideas tend to be more of an advantage than not, if only because the

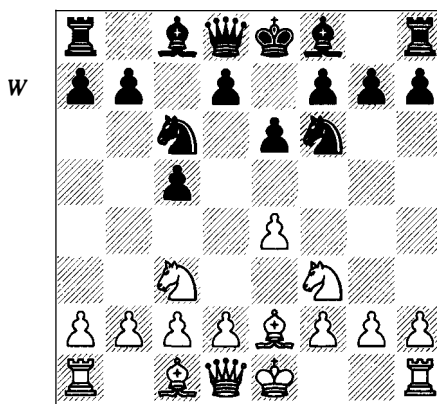
player employing them presumably knows more about the resulting positions than his opponent. Thus, no one would argue that Botvinnik, Fischer, and Kasparov, to take the three most extreme examples for their respective times, did not benefit immensely from their large supply of theoretical innovations. Arguably, in each of these three cases, their opponents underestimated the value of ever-deeper opening preparation, which allowed Fischer and Kasparov a shocking number of quick victories against sophisticated opposition. Today, of course, it is almost routine for top players like Kramnik and Anand to win games based upon their superior preparation, and a similar phenomenon takes place all the way down the ranks to master play at open tournaments.

Let's take a step back and see how this situation developed. Alekhine makes an interesting study as the transitional figure between the classical view and the modern analytical one. On the one hand, he had a classical addiction to occupying the centre with pawns and, as we have previously noted, rejected both the King's Indian Defence and the Modern Defence (1...g6). His notes in the New York 1924 and New York 1927 tournament books, while of the highest standards for his time, are full of misguided and dogmatically-phrased opinions about various openings. In Chapter 4 of this Part (the section on the relationship of flank to centre), for example, I already mentioned his exaggerated attack on the move 6 h4 in the Caro-Kann main line following 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 dxe4 4 ♘xe4 ♙f5 5 ♘g3 ♙g6, a move which is still played by every leading expert on the white side of this position. On the other hand, Alekhine came up with fresh and interesting approaches in nearly every standard opening of his day, and even showed an occasional tolerance for modern eccentricities. He defended Marshall's use of the Modern Benoni, for example, and then in 1921, out of the blue,

introduced the most hypermodern of all the defences of the Hypermodern Era, 1 e4 $\text{d}\text{f}6$. Although we sometimes hear that “Alekhine never played the Alekhine Defence”, he in fact played and annotated several well-known games with it, and even my historically-challenged database includes 10 tournament games in which he answered 1 e4 with 1... $\text{d}\text{f}6$. Ironically, this is one of the few established defences to 1 e4 which today is considered of rather marginal soundness, and has no consistent top-class advocate. And yet (perhaps in deference to Alekhine’s own greatness), most players of his time were convinced that 1... $\text{d}\text{f}6$ was perfectly sound. Spielmann talked about what a bother Alekhine’s Defence was to play against, and how “many players have been put off playing 1 e4 by this defence.” Tartakower praised it highly, and as late as 1943, Fine states categorically: “All the efforts of both classicists and moderns have been in vain: Alekhine’s Defence remains sound.”

Probably the most revealing opening for understanding Alekhine, at least with regard to his modern instincts, was the Sicilian Defence. At first, if one only follows his written notes, he seems to be almost absurdly dogmatic about 1...c5 (not to mention wrong). In his notes to Janowsky-Lasker, New York 1924, after 1 e4 c5 2 $\text{d}\text{f}3$ $\text{d}\text{c}6$, he remarks: “...this is better than 2...e6 because Black, after 3 $\text{e}2$, can accomplish the blocking of White’s c-pawn ($\text{d}\text{c}3$) by means of 3... $\text{d}\text{f}6$ (4 e5? $\text{d}\text{g}4$ 5 d4 cxd4 6 $\text{e}\text{f}4$ $\text{w}\text{c}7$).” Say what? This obsession with the dreaded 3 $\text{e}2$ continues later, when annotating Lasker-Tartakower. After 1 e4 c5 2 $\text{d}\text{f}3$ e6 3 $\text{d}\text{c}3$, Alekhine says “More to be recommended is 3 $\text{e}2$ ”, giving the lines 3...a6 4 0-0 $\text{w}\text{c}7$ 5 c4 $\text{d}\text{f}6$ 6 $\text{d}\text{c}3$ intending d4 and 3... $\text{d}\text{f}6$ 4 $\text{d}\text{c}3$ intending e5, when after ... $\text{d}\text{d}5$, $\text{d}\text{x}\text{d}5$ and d4 will follow. Needless to say, there are several things wrong with this reasoning, for example, who would play 3...a6 and 4... $\text{w}\text{c}7$ before d4 was in? (Actually, Alekhine himself did, but later criticized the idea!) Consider the best case for White using Alekhine’s $\text{e}2$ idea, say, 1 e4 c5 2 $\text{d}\text{f}3$ e6 3 $\text{e}2$ $\text{d}\text{f}6$ 4 $\text{d}\text{c}3$ $\text{d}\text{c}6$ (D) (naturally, 4...d5 is perfectly fine).

5 0-0 (5 e5 $\text{d}\text{g}4$!; but for the record, Alekhine’s line 5... $\text{d}\text{d}5$ 6 $\text{d}\text{x}\text{d}5$ exd5 7 d4 would be nothing to write home about anyway after



7...d6; for 5 d4, see the game below). Now Black can play simply 5...d5 6 exd5 exd5 or, if he really wants to be safe, 6... $\text{d}\text{x}\text{d}5$ 7 $\text{d}\text{x}\text{d}5$ $\text{w}\text{d}5$ with ... $\text{e}7$ and ...0-0 to come. Nevertheless, in his *My Best Games* volumes, Alekhine continues with this theme. Annotating his game against Bernstein, he says of 1 e4 c5 2 $\text{d}\text{f}3$ e6 3 $\text{d}\text{c}3$, “I am now convinced that the best move here is 3 $\text{e}2$, to be able to play c4 if Black adopts the Paulsen variation (...a6, ... $\text{w}\text{c}7$, etc.).”

With a little research, we soon discover that these opinions are shaped primarily by the results of Alekhine’s own games, and not by independent theoretical investigation. It turns out that he had played the following game:

Alekhine – Verlinsky Odessa 1918

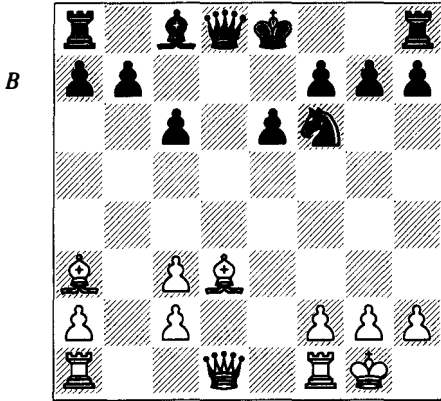
1 e4 c5 2 $\text{d}\text{f}3$ $\text{d}\text{c}6$ 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\text{d}\text{x}\text{d}4$ e6 5 $\text{d}\text{c}3$ $\text{d}\text{f}6$ 6 $\text{e}2$

This is the same position as would arrive in the Lasker-Tartakower game notes after 3 $\text{e}2$ $\text{d}\text{f}6$ 4 $\text{d}\text{c}3$ e6 5 d4 cxd4 6 $\text{d}\text{x}\text{d}4$, so presumably that is the transposition Alekhine was thinking about in his notes above. And in the game against Verlinsky, he won a very nice game, which probably accounts for his enthusiasm about this position. But today, it’s easy to see that Black stands well here, as I’ll indicate in my notes to the game.

6... $\text{e}\text{b}4$! 7 0-0 $\text{e}\text{xc}3$ 8 bxc3 $\text{d}\text{x}\text{e}4$ 9 $\text{d}\text{xc}6$ dxc6

Even the eccentric 9... $\text{w}\text{f}6$! is quite interesting here, e.g., 10 $\text{d}\text{d}4$? $\text{d}\text{xc}3$ 11 $\text{w}\text{d}3$ $\text{w}\text{d}4$ or 10 $\text{e}\text{a}3$ $\text{d}\text{xc}3$ 11 $\text{w}\text{d}3$ dxc6, etc.

10 $\text{e}\text{d}3$ $\text{d}\text{f}6$ 11 $\text{e}\text{a}3$ (D)



11...b6?

Among other moves, 11...♖a5! 12 ♙b4 ♜c7 is very strong, intending ...c5, e.g., 13 ♜e1 c5; White lacks any compensation for the pawn.

12 ♜f3 ♜d5?! 13 ♜g3 ♙b7 14 c4

14 ♜ad1!.

14...♜d4 15 c3!? ♜xc3 16 ♙d6 0-0-0 17 c5 bxc5 18 ♙b8 ♜a5 19 ♙e5 ♜d7 20 ♙xg7 ♜hg8 21 ♜ab1 f6!?

21...♜f6!.

22 ♙c4 ♜f8 23 ♜xb7 ♜xb7 24 ♜b1+ 1-0

For the record, I'm not sure that Black should be resigning here! Even 24...♜b6!? 25 ♜xb6+ axb6 is very interesting, since the bishop on g7 will also fall, e.g., 26 ♜a3 ♜d1+ 27 ♙f1 ♜xg7 28 ♜a6+ ♜b8! 29 ♜xb6+ ♜b7, etc. But being White in a game like this could convince one that the ♙e2 idea was appropriate, since it could well lead to this apparently attractive variation.

Similarly, it's quite possible that Alekhine became enthusiastic about this 3 ♙e2 approach based upon the following win:

Alekhine – Sämisch

Berlin 1923

1 e4 c5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♙e2

Alekhine explains: "The text-move indicates White's intention to castle before undertaking any action in the centre."

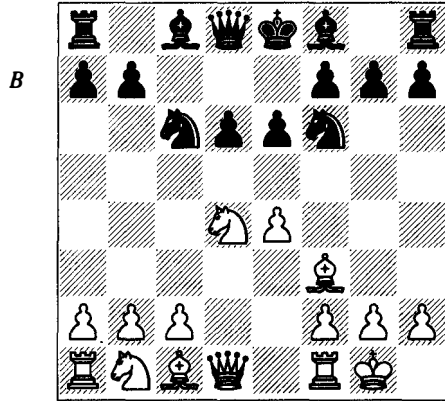
3...e6 4 0-0 d6!?

Here 4...♜f6 5 ♜c3 d5 would equalize.

5 d4 cxd4 6 ♜xd4 ♜f6 7 ♙f3?! (D)

Alekhine gives this bizarre move an '!', explaining: "White delays the plausible move 7 ♜c3 in order to play first c4, thus preventing all

counterattack on the c-file." I need hardly point out how badly the bishop on f3 stands, even if Black develops quietly and allows c4 (see our discussion of Hedgehog positions).



7...♙e5

"To secure the advantage of the two bishops, which is rather illusory in this position. But this manoeuvre loses valuable time which would be better utilized in playing ...♙e7, ...0-0, and ...♙d7, etc." (Alekhine). Well, ...♙e5 is a perfectly good move, but Alekhine is also right that normal development would be fine, and in fact it would leave the bishop looking rather silly on f3. Since White does achieve some attack after the text-move, 7...♙d7 or even 7...♜b6 is probably preferable.

8 c4 ♜xf3+ 9 ♜xf3 ♙e7 10 ♜c3 0-0 11 b3 ♜d7?!

Alekhine calls this a 'further loss of time' in conjunction with the next move, and I agree. These days, Black would happily play something like 11...a6 12 ♙b2 ♜c7, intending ...b6, when his position is at least satisfactory. The rest of the game is deservedly famous, but not relevant for the opening. White builds up a huge attack and then overwhelms his opponent with a pretty sacrifice:

12 ♙b2 ♙f6 13 ♜ad1 a6 14 ♜g3 ♜c7 15 ♙h1 ♜d8 16 f4 b6 17 f5 ♙e5 18 fxe6!! ♙xg3 19 exf7+ ♙h8 20 ♜d5 1-0

This was an exhibition game, or perhaps Black would have played on, but Alekhine demonstrates by lengthy analysis how 20...♜b8, 20...♜a7, 20...♜b7, and 20...♜c5 all lose (the first two fail to 21 ♜c6 and the last two to 21 ♙e6).

My point was to show how Alekhine came by this fondness for 3 ♖e2 in the Sicilian. Essentially, he had successes with it, and he also felt that it avoided a system which was clearly bothering him (Paulsen's 1 e4 c5 2 ♟f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♟xd4 a6 followed by ...♞c7, an order which Alekhine himself had aimed for in his early Sicilian experiments as Black). So is that the end of the story? Not at all, and this is the interesting part: Alekhine played 3 ♖e2 versus the Sicilian, notwithstanding all of his proclamations, on only three occasions that I can find! By contrast, he played the normal 2 ♟f3 and 3 d4 (against 2...♟c6, 2...e6, and 2...d6) 27 times in the same database. Most of these latter games, moreover, came after he had made his notes above praising 3 ♖e2. In other words, he had the open-mindedness and flexibility to recognize the flaws in his own argument, and at some point, simply switched to the move which he recognized would offer him the best chances. In fact, once one recognizes the gap between Alekhine's rather dogmatic prose and his actual, pragmatic play, much of what he writes becomes easier to swallow. As a player, Alekhine's later games were marked by a great deal of experimentation and latitude in the openings, and he was truly the first world-class player to cross the line from classical into modern play.

The Analytical Revolution

The next step in opening theory took place in the Soviet Union of the 1930s. In particular, Botvinnik was the first world champion who became known primarily as a methodical analyst of specific systems. The word 'systems' is particularly appropriate in his case, because he did not, like many contemporary players, have the propensity to play just about anything when it suited him. Instead, he submitted particular variations and structures to in-depth analysis and was loyal to them for periods of time. Imre König in his 1950 study of the evolution of openings, makes this interesting remark: "Botvinnik, the present world champion, has been reproached for having a very limited range of openings, and for playing on the same lines all the time. This goes to prove that the modern age is the age of specialization, and that specialization is the only way to attain perfection." Well,

his statement goes to prove that one should not extrapolate from the *zeitgeist* to the chess club! Although the modern world is indeed marked by specialization, modern chess is specifically characterized by its *lack* of specialization. For some time now, the leading players have played a much wider variety of openings and positions than ever before. König's comment on Botvinnik may or may not have been appropriate for the specific time period he was writing in; but over the course of his career Botvinnik played a remarkable number of opening systems, analysing many of them to a depth previously unknown. The fact that he played fewer games than his contemporaries added to this impression for depth, since he would appear after a long absence armed with an array of new weapons. However, there was always impressive variety in his opening play. As White, he relied mainly upon 1 d4 and 1 c4, developing much of the first independent theory about the latter move; but early in his career he used 1 e4 as well. And within the context of his 1 d4, he played at least two systems against every major black defence. As Black, he defended against 1 e4 with 1...e5, two different Sicilian Defences, and the French Defence. Later, he added the Caro-Kann and Pirc Defences and played them consistently over the last stages of his career. Versus 1 d4, he used various 1...d5 defences (Queen's Gambit Declined and Slav, for example), the Grünfeld, and Dutch Defences, and he experimented with the Nimzo-Indian and King's Indian Defences. Compare that breadth with Lasker, for example, who seldom strayed from a straight and narrow 1 e4 e5 and 1 d4 d5; or with Capablanca, who did the same for many years until he added on some Caro-Kanns and Nimzo-Indians towards the end. Which age had the specialists?

After Botvinnik, almost all masters routinely worked on their opening repertoires in his thorough, systematic fashion. But with the possible exception of Smyslov, the next few champions relied upon their talent more than upon their openings. Certainly Tal and Petrosian were wont to play rather loosely in the opening; they had some ingenious ideas (as geniuses do), but hardly carried the comprehensive repertoires we see today. With Fischer, another leap in the depth of analysis took place comparable to that

introduced by Botvinnik. Fischer won numerous games which were effectively over before move 20, even against top competition, by virtue of his superior preparation. Whereas Botvinnik surprised his opponents with openings worked out to move 10, for example, Fischer was suddenly prepared for positions arising on move 20 or later. The lesson was not lost on his peers, and chess hasn't been the same since. The post-Fischer era has been characterized by a flood of opening material which is so staggering that even specialists have to ignore large amounts of the information flowing in. Leading players spend most of their time working on openings, assisted by their friends and computers (who may also be their friends).

All of this change is symbolized by Kasparov, whose preparation exceeds that of any of his contemporaries. A major difference between Kasparov and Fischer is that Kasparov carries full and enormously complex repertoires for both 1 e4 and 1 d4, plays 1 c4 with confidence, and has played a wide array of defences as well. For example, against 1 d4, he is known as the leading expert in both the Grünfeld and King's Indian Defences, but he has also played at championship level with the Queen's Gambit Declined, the Tarrasch Queen's Gambit, the Semi-Slav Defence, the Nimzo-Indian, and upon occasion, the Modern Benoni! Most 2200-level players can hardly keep up with one such defence, much less 5 or 6 at a time. By contrast, Fischer was very much a specialist, who had only just begun to play a few games with, for example, 1 c4 or alternate e-pawn defences like the Pirc when he quit chess. But the arsenal of weapons I described for Kasparov is not some freakish phenomenon limited to world-class geniuses. It is rapidly becoming the rule for leading players to carry large repertoires, as the reader may confirm by using their databases to make an openings chart for various top GMs. To be sure, a few players (most notably Karpov, and to a lesser extent, Kramnik) specialize in a small set of systems and count upon their in-depth knowledge to make up for their predictability; but the trend at the moment is very much in the opposite direction. Personally, I believe that the new flexibility in opening play makes for richer and more exciting chess.

An Overview of Contemporary Theory

Let's take a tour through a few recent *Informators* and try to relate the openings which catch our eye to various concepts discussed in this book. In that way, we will get a random, but hopefully typical, exposure to contemporary opening play. I will structure the discussion in five sections ('A' to 'E'), following the well-known 'A00-E99' opening structure used in the *Informators* themselves. Be forewarned that this is not opening analysis, but a relatively uncritical promenade through modern practice. My notes are simply guides to the strategies and modern concepts expressed in the games, and by no means detailed analysis. I hope that this section, casually presented as it is, will be fun and instructive for the player who wants to get a practical handle on how the concepts in this book work in practice.

A00-A99

This section is the best source for 'avant-garde' games (see the end of this chapter), but also for the post-hypermodern openings which trade off space or development for other advantages. Here's an example relating back to our doubled pawn discussions:

Korchnoi – Bacrot

Enghien les Bains 1997

1 ♖f3 d5 2 b3 ♙g4 3 ♙b2 ♙xf3

So typical these days! Black casually cedes the bishops for doubled pawns.

4 gxf3 ♖f6 5 e3 c5 6 f4!? ♖c6 7 ♙g2 e6 8 d3 g6! 9 c4?!

Too loosening; better is 9 ♖d2 ♙g7 10 ♖f3 with double-edged play.

9...♙g7 10 ♖c3 0-0 11 0-0 d4!

Old-fashioned space.

12 ♖a4

12...♖g4! would follow after other white replies.

12...♗d6 13 ♗b1 ♗ac8 14 ♙c1 b6 15 a3 dxe3! 16 fxe3 ♗fd8 17 ♖b2 e5!

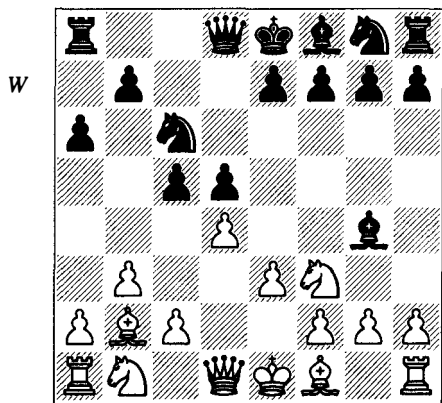
Black is considerably better, since White's centre is immobile and subject to attack.

What about reversed openings? Here White reverses a 4 a3 QID and gets ... nothing!

Welling – Atalik

Cappelle la Grande 1997

1 $\text{d}f3$ $\text{d}5$ 2 $\text{b}3$ $\text{c}5$ 3 $\text{e}3$ $\text{a}6$ 4 $\text{b}2$ $\text{c}6$ 5 $\text{d}4$
The reversed QID.
5... $\text{g}4$ (D)



Simple enough; Black doesn't need an advantage.

6 $\text{e}2$

In 1998, Hodgson played the imbalancing 6 $\text{dxc}5!$ here. As is true of many reversed-opening set-ups, 6 $\text{e}2$ only equalizes.

6... $\text{xf}3$ 7 $\text{xf}3$ $\text{cxd}4$ 8 $\text{xd}4!$

8 $\text{exd}4$ $\text{e}6$ 9 0-0 $\text{g}6$ 10 $\text{e}1$ $\text{g}7$ – Atalik.

8... $\text{xd}4$ 9 $\text{xd}4$ $\text{e}6$ 10 0-0 $\text{e}7!$ 11 $\text{e}4!$
 $\text{dxe}4$ 12 $\text{xe}4$ $\text{b}8$ 13 $\text{c}3$ $\text{c}8!$ 14 $\text{d}3$ $\text{f}6$
15 $\text{e}4$ 0-0

with equality (Atalik).

The next example has a very modern flavour. Black gives up the bishop-pair for certain developmental and colour-complex reasons, but is surprised when White suddenly launches his pawns forward on the kingside without any central presence or much development!

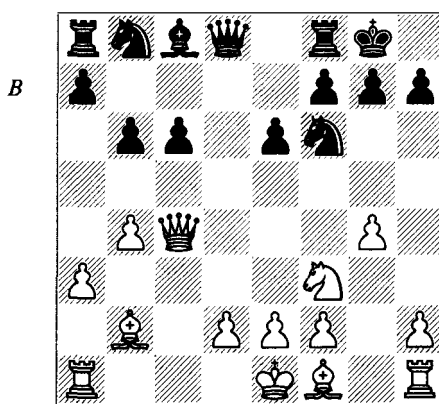
Komarov – Razuvaev

Reggio Emilia 1996/7

1 $\text{d}f3$ $\text{d}f6$ 2 $\text{c}4$ $\text{e}6$ 3 $\text{c}3$ $\text{b}4$ 4 $\text{c}2$ 0-0 5 $\text{a}3$
 $\text{xc}3$ 6 $\text{xc}3$ $\text{d}5$

Bishops for development and centre, as in our Nimzo-Indian examples.

7 $\text{b}4$ $\text{dxc}4!$? 8 $\text{xc}4$ $\text{b}6$ 9 $\text{b}2$ $\text{c}6!$?
To play ... $\text{a}6$ without the reply $\text{b}5$.
10 $\text{g}4!$ (D)



A violation of numerous principles, but if it works...

10... $\text{a}5!$ 11 $\text{g}5$ $\text{d}5$ 12 $\text{g}1$ $\text{axb}4?!$ 13 $\text{d}4!$
 $\text{f}6$ 14 $\text{gxf}6$ $\text{xf}6?$

But 14... $\text{xf}6$ 15 $\text{axb}4$ still favours White.

15 $\text{fxg}7+$! $\text{fxg}7$

15... $\text{h}8$ 16 $\text{e}4!$.

16 $\text{g}4+$

White went on to win.

For many years, Black has been willing to enter the following line, pitting a classical white bind against Black's rapid development and flexible pawn structure. Both Smyslov and Kasparov have taken the dynamic side (Black) with success.

Vera – Hodgson

Winnipeg 1997

1 $\text{d}4$ $\text{d}6$ 2 $\text{c}4$ $\text{e}5$ 3 $\text{c}3$ $\text{exd}4$ 4 $\text{xd}4$ $\text{c}6$ 5
 $\text{d}2$ $\text{d}f6$ 6 $\text{b}3$ $\text{e}6$ 7 $\text{e}4$ $\text{g}6$ 8 $\text{b}2$ $\text{g}7$ 9 $\text{d}3$
 0-0 10 $\text{d}e2$ $\text{d}g4!$

Before White can complete his development, Black threatens ... $\text{h}4$ and contemplates ... $\text{e}5$ and ... $\text{f}5$.

11 $\text{h}3$

A typical line would be 11 0-0 $\text{h}4$ 12 $\text{h}3$
 $\text{d}e5!$ 13 $\text{f}4$ $\text{xd}3$ 14 $\text{xd}3$ $\text{f}5$.

11... $\text{d}e5$ 12 $\text{0-0-0}!$? $\text{d}b4$ 13 $\text{b}1$ $\text{xc}4!$
14 $\text{bxc}4$ $\text{dxc}4$

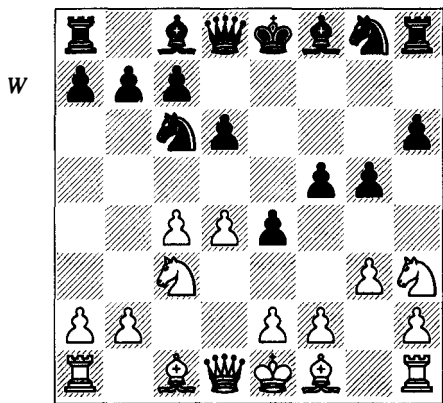
with a strong attack, although White defended well and drew.

Hodgson is again involved in next game, implementing a now well-established black tactic of throwing his kingside pawns forward, despite his apparent lack of development and the weaknesses created thereby:

Korchnoi – Hodgson

Groningen 1996

1 c4 e5 2 ♖c3 d6 3 g3 ♘c6 4 ♜f3 f5 5 d4 e4 6 ♜g5 h6 7 ♜h3 g5! (D)



The pawns restrict White's knight, which is, incidentally, 'on the rim', and stays there for considerable time, returning to good effect when needed.

8 f3

And yet, a truly modern response would be to move that knight a *fourth* time, back to g1 by 8 ♜g1!? ♜g7 9 d5, followed by h4; that also looks unclear.

8...exf3 9 exf3 ♜g7 10 d5 ♜e7+ 11 ♜f2 ♜e5 12 f4

No fear!

12...♜g4+ 13 ♜g2 ♜d7! 14 ♜e2 ♜xc3!?

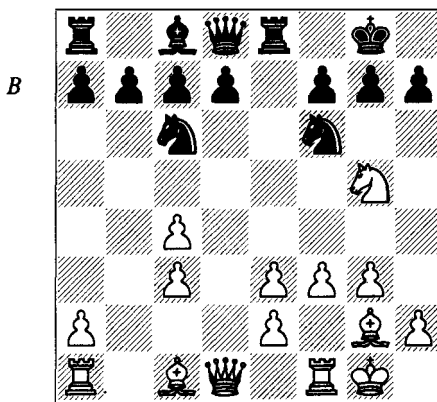
Another difficult-to-assess imbalance.

15 bxc3 ♜xe2+ 16 ♜e2 gxf4 17 ♜xf4 0-0-0 18 ♜g6! ♜h7 19 ♜f1 ♜e8 20 ♜d3 ♜e7 21 ♜e1! ♜xg6 22 ♜xe8+ ♜xe8 23 ♜xf5+ ♜d7 24 ♜xg6 ♜e7

with approximate equality, due to White's doubled pawns.

The next examples show how rule-defiant players have become. What strong positional player would even consider taking on the ugly pawns and horrendous bishops White gets after

1 c4 ♜f6 2 ♜c3 e5 3 ♜f3 ♜c6 4 g3 ♜b4 5 ♜g2 0-0 6 0-0 e4 7 ♜g5 ♜xc3 8 bxc3 ♜e8 9 f3 e3 10 dxe3 (D)?



And yet that's just what Gulko and Topalov did, feeling that they could exploit their bishop-pair and mobile kingside pawns. Kasparov and others had played 10 d3 versus Karpov's 9...e3, hoping to surround that pawn, but also allowing it to cramp White's play. After 10 dxe3, White is committed to dynamism, as these examples show:

Gulko – Illescas

Spanish Team Ch, Oropesa del Mar 1996

10...h6 11 ♜h3 ♜e5 12 e4! ♜xc4 13 ♜d4 ♜e5 14 c4 d6 15 ♜f4 b6 16 ♜d5 c5! 17 ♜c3 ♜xd5 18 cxd5 b5!?

18...f6! – Gulko.

19 f4! b4 20 ♜c2 ♜d7 21 e5! dxe5 22 fxe5 ♜xe5 23 d6! ♜a6!

After 23...♜b8 24 ♜xc5, the bishops are too strong.

24 ♜xa8 ♜xa8 25 ♜b2 ♜c6!

and Black had just enough counterplay to hold the balance, but misplayed and lost.

Topalov – Gelfand

Novgorod 1997

10...b6 11 e4 h6 12 ♜xf7?!

Too crazy. 12 ♜h3 is objectively better.

12...♜xf7 13 f4 ♜g8 14 e5 ♜h7

Now, instead of 15 ♜a3!? ♜b7 16 ♜e4 ♜h8 17 ♜c2 ♜xe5! 18 fxe5 ♜xe5 with a clear advantage to Black, Gelfand suggested 15 f5!?,

although after 15...♖e7! 16 f6 gxf6 17 ♔d5+ ♕g7 18 ♖d2 ♖xe5 19 ♖xh6+ ♕h8, this doesn't seem sufficient.

Gulko – Timoshenko

Nova Gorica 1997

10...h6 11 ♖h3 b6 12 e4 ♔a6?!

Better is 12...d6!? 13 ♖f2 ♔a6 14 f4 ♖a5, according to Timoshenko.

13 c5 bxc5 14 ♔a3 d6 15 ♖a4 ♖b8 16 e5!? dxe5 17 ♖fd1 ♖c8 18 e4

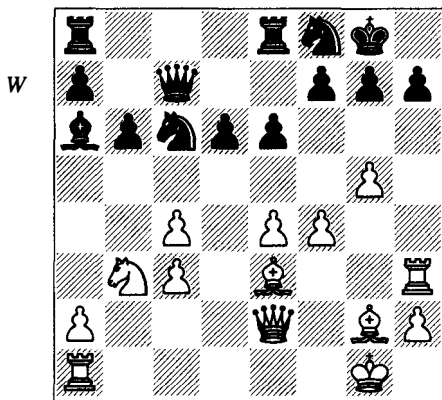
with complications.

Next, we see an example of the bishop-pair and attack failing to compensate for doubled c-pawns. The other typically modern aspect of this game is the depth of preparation.

Lobron – Hulak

Erevan Olympiad 1996

1 ♖f3 c5 2 c4 ♖c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖f6 5 ♖c3 e6 6 g3 ♖b6 7 ♖b3 ♖e5 8 e4 ♔b4 9 ♖e2 d6 10 f4 ♖c6 11 ♔e3 ♖c7 12 ♔g2 ♔xc3+ 13 bxc3 0-0 14 0-0 b6 15 g4 ♔a6 16 g5 ♖d7 17 ♖f3 ♖fe8 18 ♖h3 ♖f8 (D)



19 f5 ♖e5 20 ♖h5 ♖xc4!

The first new move! Previously, 20...♔xc4 had been played.

21 ♔d4 ♖e2! 22 ♖h4 ♖g4 23 ♖xg4 ♖xg4 24 ♖g3 ♖e5

and Black was better.

The next game exemplifies, above all, the triumph of dynamism over structure:

Mirković – Djukić

Yugoslavia 1997

1 d4 ♖f6 2 ♖f3 g6 3 c4 c5 4 d5 b5 5 cxb5 a6 6 e4!

These pawn sacrifices for activity haven't been this common since the nineteenth century!

6...♖xe4 7 ♖c2 f5

White has the initiative after 7...♖a5+ 8 ♖bd2 f5 9 ♔d3 axb5 10 0-0.

8 ♖bd2 ♖f6!?

8...♖xd2 9 ♔xd2 allows White too much activity.

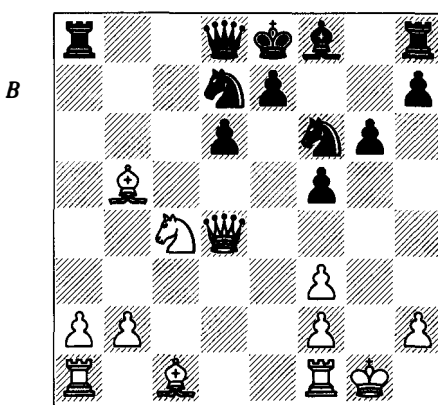
9 ♖xc5 d6 10 ♖d4 ♔b7 11 ♔c4 axb5 12 ♔xb5+ ♖bd7 13 0-0 ♔xd5

It looks like Black has won the centre and stands very well, but...

14 ♖c4! ♔xf3

In view of 14...♔g7 15 ♖b6 ♔xf3 16 ♖xd7!.

15 gxf3 (D)



15...♖b8

White's attack is decisive after 15...♔g7 16 ♖xd6+! exd6 17 ♖e1+ ♕f7 18 ♔c4+ d5 19 ♔xd5+ ♖xd5 20 ♖xd5+ ♕f8 21 ♔f4.

16 ♖e1 ♔g7 17 ♖xd6+! ♕f8 18 ♔f4 ♖e8

White should now have played 19 ♖d5! ♖xd6 20 ♔xd6 ♖xb5! 21 ♔xe7+ ♖xe7 22 ♖xb5 ♖e5 23 ♕f1 f4 24 ♖e4 with a winning position, since White doubles rooks on the e-file next.

The following opening might fit into the 'avant-garde' section below, but also shows the type of early flank thrust which has characterized contemporary play.

Piket – Adams*Groningen 1995*

1 d4 e6 2 c4 ♟f6 3 ♟f3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 ♟d6!?

The Snake! Note that Adams is one of the world's top players.

6 ♟c3 ♟c7 7 g4!?

One of those space-grabbing ideas, based on driving away Black's only good piece.

7...d6!?

In the next game that featured these moves, Black improved with 7...♟a5!, claiming e4 for the knight.

8 g5 ♟f7 9 h4 a6 10 a4 ♟e7 11 ♟h3! 0-0 12 ♟d3 ♟e5 13 ♟xe5 ♟xe5 14 a5! ♟d4?! 15 ♟g3 ♟b4 16 h5

White's space and attack were soon decisive.

B00-B99

We have already talked a lot about Sicilians and English Openings in this book, but probably not enough about the Modern Defence itself. Here's a recent example:

Berelovich – Svidler*Russian Team Ch, Azov 1996*

1 e4 g6 2 d4 ♟g7 3 ♟c3 d6 4 f4 a6

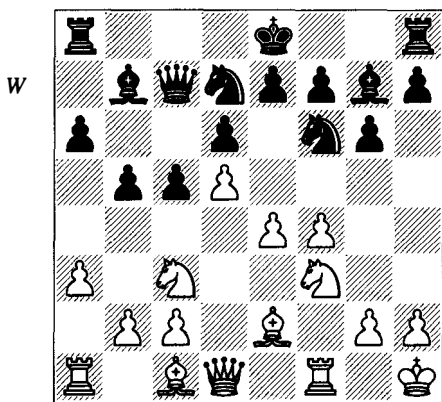
An ultra-modern attempt to chip away at the centre from the flank.

5 ♟f3 b5 6 a3 ♟d7 7 ♟e2 ♟b7

Bishops before knights.

8 0-0 c5 9 d5 ♟c7 10 ♟h1 ♟gf6 (D)

Provocation in a provocative opening! And White takes the bait:



11 e5!? dxe5 12 fxe5

Now Black allowed White's attack to get through after 12...♟xe5? 13 ♟xe5 ♟xe5 14 ♟f4 ♟d4 15 ♟e1 and there were too many threats. But as Berelovich showed, Black could have decimated White's centre after 12...♟g4! 13 d6 ♟c6! 14 ♟d3 (14 dxe7 ♟dxe5) 14...f5 15 exf6 ♟dxf6 16 dxe7 c4 17 ♟e2 ♟c7! 18 ♟d4 ♟xe7 with good play.

Here's a case where the two knights and space keep the two bishops under control:

Ivanchuk – Dreev*Linares 1997*

1 c4 c6 2 e4 d5 3 exd5 ♟f6 4 ♟c3 cxd5 5 d4 e6 6 ♟f3 ♟b4 7 ♟g5 h6 8 ♟xf6 ♟xf6 9 ♟b3 ♟e7?

9...♟xc3+ 10 ♟xc3 dxc4 11 ♟xc4 ♟c6 12 0-0 ♟d7 is equal, according to Dreev.

10 c5! ♟a5 11 ♟b5+ ♟d7 12 ♟e5 ♟c6 13 ♟xc6 ♟xc6 14 0-0 ♟c7 15 f4

It's obvious that White is much better, especially if he follows up with ♟c2 and b4, fully exploiting his space advantage.

The revival of the Caro-Kann is in large part due to the discovery of players like Karpov and Speelman that Black can often benefit from keeping his king in the centre. Here are two simple examples which also feature Nimzowitsch's surrender of the centre, complete with the queenside fianchetto which was his favourite plan in such positions:

Kharitonov – Yandemirov*Moscow 1996*

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♟c3 dxe4 4 ♟xe4 ♟d7 5 ♟g5 ♟gf6 6 ♟d3 e6 7 ♟f3 ♟d6 8 ♟e2 h6 9 ♟e4 ♟xe4 10 ♟xe4 ♟c7 11 ♟g4 ♟f8

This is now routine.

12 0-0 b6 13 ♟e1 ♟b7 14 ♟d2 ♟f6 15 ♟h4 c5

This freeing move generally equalizes.

16 ♟e5 cxd4 17 ♟xd4 ♟d8 18 ♟b4 ♟e7

The black king is well-placed in the centre.

19 ♟ad1 ♟xb4 20 ♟xb4+ ♟c5 21 ♟xc5+ bxc5

Black has no problems.

Svidler – Karpov*Tilburg 1996*

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♖c3 dxe4 4 ♖xe4 ♖d7 5 ♗c4
 ♖gf6 6 ♖g5 e6 7 ♗e2 ♖b6 8 ♗d3 h6 9 ♖5f3
 c5 10 ♗e3 ♗c7 11 ♖e5 ♗d6 12 ♖gf3 ♖bd5!
 13 ♗b5+ ♗e7

The point.

14 0-0 a6 15 ♗d3 b5 16 c3 ♗b7
 with full equality.

The typical Sicilian Defence backward-pawn position in which Black simply concedes the outpost for bishops and some open lines is illustrated in the next encounter:

Anand – Kramnik*Dortmund 1997*

1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖f6 5
 ♖c3 e5 6 ♖db5 d6 7 ♗g5 a6 8 ♖a3 b5 9 ♖d5
 ♗e7 10 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 11 c3 0-0 12 ♖c2 ♗g5 13
 ♗e2 ♖e7 14 ♖cb4 a5 15 ♖xe7+ ♗xe7 16
 ♖d5 ♗b7 17 ♗d3 b4 18 cxb4 axb4 19 ♗b3
 ♗e6 20 ♗c4 ♗ac8 21 0-0 ♗c6

Now the outpost falls; Black never had any problems here.

22 ♗ac1 ♗xd5 23 exd5 ♗c5 24 ♗c2 g6
 1/2-1/2

One of the most popular lines of the Najdorf Sicilian was invented just a few years ago, and illustrates Black's pragmatism: he makes several early and theoretically weakening flank pawn moves, but this creates a diversion which forces White to alter his plans.

Short – Topalov*Novgorod 1997*

1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖f6 5 ♖c3
 a6 6 ♗e3 ♖g4 7 ♗g5 h6 8 ♗h4 g5 9 ♗g3 ♗g7
 10 ♗e2 h5 11 ♗xg4

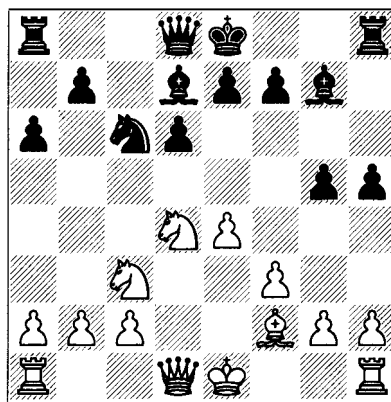
Conceding the bishop-pair, but other answers to ...h4 are somewhat weakening.

11...♗xg4 12 f3 ♗d7 13 ♗f2 ♖c6 (D)

14 0-0

A recent game Anand-Kasparov, Frankfurt 1998 shows White pursuing a quiet strategy which would have seemed irrational to the Sicilian player of a few decades ago, but pays

W



dividends: 14 ♗d2 ♖e5 15 b3 e6 16 ♖de2!
 ♗c8 17 ♗d4 b5 18 ♖d1! ♗g8 19 ♖e3 a5 20
 0-0-0 a4 21 ♗b1. White's centralized pieces
 protect against a real attack on his king, and in
 the meantime, Black's king is still in the centre.
 Eventually, this comes to haunt him: 21...axb3
 22 cxb3 ♗a8 23 ♗c3 ♗a6 24 ♖c2 ♗f8 25 ♖b4
 ♗a8 26 ♖d4 ♗e7 27 ♗he1 ♗c8 28 ♗b2 ♗b7 29
 ♖dc2 f6 30 ♖d4 h4 31 g3 g4 32 f4 ♖f3 33 ♖xf3
 gxf3 34 f5 hxg3 35 hxg3 ♗xg3 36 ♗h2 ♗g5 37
 ♗c1 ♗g7 38 ♗h5+ ♗f7 39 ♗xf3 1-0. Presum-
 ably Black lost on time, but White is much
 better with his control of d5 and central files.

14...e6 15 ♖xc6!? ♗xc6 16 ♗d4 ♗e5! 17
 ♗d2 ♗f6 18 ♗xe5 dxe5 19 a4 0-0 20 b3 ♗fd8
 21 ♗e3 ♗f4 22 ♗xf4 gxf4 23 ♗fd1 h4

Black is somewhat better because his dou-
 bled pawns are strong, restricting White's
 knight. Again, in these two examples, the side
 which better organized his minor pieces got the
 better game.

C00-C99

Against the French, Nimzowitsch's favourite
 Advance Variation is moderately popular, but
 there are few games which test the idea of occu-
 pying the central squares, such as this one:

Sveshnikov – Cherniaev*Moscow 1996*

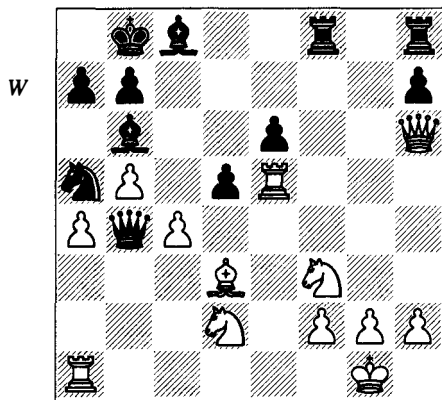
1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 ♖c6 5 ♖f3 ♖h6!?

6 dxc5 ♗xc5 7 b4 ♗b6 8 b5 ♖a5 9 ♗xh6 gxf6
 An interesting trade-off between Black's
 weakened kingside and White's weakened
 queenside.

10 ♖d2 ♙d7 11 ♜xh6 ♜e7 12 ♙d3

Cherniaev considers Black better, despite his pawn minus, after 12 ♜g5?! ♜xg5 13 ♜xg5 ♜c8.

12...0-0-0 13 0-0 ♜df8 14 ♜bd2 ♜b8 15 a4 f6 16 c4 ♙c8 17 ♜fe1 fxe5 18 ♜xe5 ♜b4! (D)



A very interesting dynamic imbalance has arisen. White has the e5-square under control, à la Nimzowitsch, but Black has great activity and the two bishops. The game was justifiably drawn after complications.

Exchange sacrifices are everywhere in modern chess, but the ...♜xf3 sacrifice in the French must appear in more varied situations than any other.

Krupkova – Gleizerov

Mariehamn/Österaker 1997

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜d2 ♜f6 4 e5 ♜fd7 5 c3 c5 6 f4 ♜c6 7 ♜df3 ♜b6 8 g3 cxd4 9 cxd4 ♙e7 10 ♙h3 0-0 11 ♜e2 f6 12 ♜f1 ♜h8 13 ♜c3!? fxe5 14 fxe5 ♜xf3! 15 ♜xf3 ♜xd4 16 ♜h5!

16 ♜f7? ♜d8!.

16...♜d8! 17 ♜d1?

17 ♜d1! ♜c6! 18 ♙f4 ♜c5 with compensation due to White's exposed king – Gleizerov.

17...♜c6 18 ♙xe6 d4 19 ♜d5 ♜dx5 20 ♙xc8 ♜xd5

Black's attack is overwhelming.

Remember our discussion of flank-pawn grabbing with the queen? Here's a line that's starting to look a bit like the Poisoned Pawn Najdorf:

Timoshenko – Itkis

Baile Herculane 1996

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜c3 ♜f6 4 e5 ♜fd7 5 f4 c5 6 ♜f3 ♜c6 7 ♙e3 cxd4 8 ♜xd4 ♜b6 9 ♜d2 ♜xb2 10 ♜b1 ♜a3

Znosko-Borovsky's principle is highly relevant here: the queen itself provides some counterplay against White's c3 point, which gives Black a chance against the coming onslaught.

11 ♙b5! ♜xd4!?

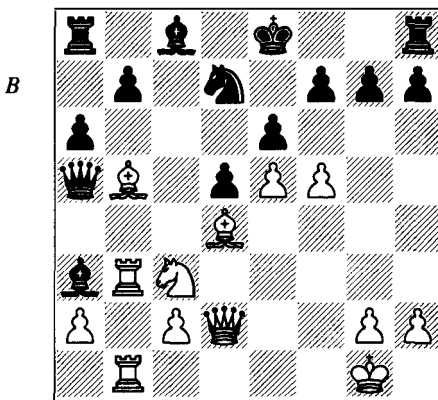
Risky. Later games saw 11...♜db8 12 f5! ♙b4!, apparently leading to a messy equality.

12 ♜xd4 ♙b4 13 0-0 a6 14 ♜b3 ♜a5 15 ♜fb1 ♙a3!?

Very provocative. 15...♜xb5 is unclear after both 16 ♜xb5 ♙xd2 and 16 ♜xb4 ♜c6.

16 f5!! (D)

Timoshenko attributes this move to Kruppa.



16...axb5 17 ♜xa3! ♜xa3 18 ♜xb5 ♜xa2 19 ♜d6+ ♜f8 20 ♜a1 ♜xa1+ 21 ♙xa1 ♜xa1+ 22 ♜f2

Here the game went 22...♜a8? 23 ♜g5! f6 24 ♜h5 g6 25 ♜h6+ with a winning attack. Better seems 22...♜xe5 (Nunn), leading to 23 ♜c3 ♜g4+ 24 ♜e2, when 24...♜a8? 25 ♜c7! is good for White, but 24...♜e7 holds out hope for equality, for example 25 ♜xc8+ (25 ♜b4!? is another possibility) 25...♜xc8 26 ♜xc8 ♜a4! 27 ♜xb7+ ♜f6.

Four themes from this book arise in the following game: tripled pawns, the struggle between two bishops and two knights, the early space-grab by flank pawn moves, and a rook-lift on the fourth rank.

Urošević – Zlatanović*Yugoslavia 1996*

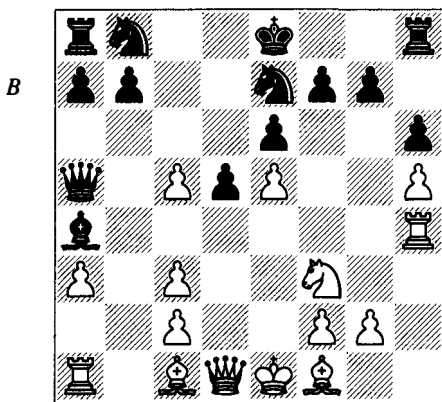
1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♖c3 ♙b4 4 e5 ♗e7 5 a3
 ♙xc3+ 6 bxc3 c5 7 ♗f3 ♙d7 8 h4 ♙a4 9 h5

An increasingly popular idea which, as explained in Part 2, Chapter 3, has to do with prophylactically denying Black his usual kingside play, as well as setting up long-term prospects for White on that wing.

9...h6 10 dxc5!

And here is a case of the tripled-pawn complex used to open lines and transfer pieces via d4; see Part 1, Chapter 4.

10...♙a5 11 ♖h4! (D)



The fourth-rank rook-lift discussed in Part 1, Chapter 7; note how White's bishops remain undeveloped, as structure and the 'most difficult' pieces are attended to first.

11...♗d7 12 ♙d2 ♗xc5 13 c4

A feature of the tripled-pawn complex: the pawns can be used as levers to chip away at the opponent's centre.

13...♙d8 14 cxd5 ♙xd5 15 ♙e3! ♗e4 16 ♙xd5 exd5 17 ♗d4

White has a clear advantage in the queenless middlegame, due to his extra pawn and two bishops.

Here's another example from the same opening. White again engages in kingside flank moves for prophylactic effect, and Black closely attends to Alekhine's 'most difficult piece first' principle by ...♙d7-a4, ...♗d7, and ...♙g8-h7. A good example of foregoing castling in order to optimize piece placement.

Klovans – Rustemov*Swidnica 1997*

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♖c3 ♙b4 4 e5 ♗e7 5 ♗f3 c5
 6 a3 ♙xc3+ 7 bxc3 b6 8 ♙b5+ ♙d7 9 ♙d3
 ♙a4 10 h4 h6 11 0-0 c4 12 ♙e2 ♗d7! 13 h5
 ♙g8! 14 ♙e3 ♙h7

Targeting c2.

15 ♖c1 ♗a6!? 16 ♗h4 ♗c7

16...g5!? 17 hxg6 fxg6 was a serious option.

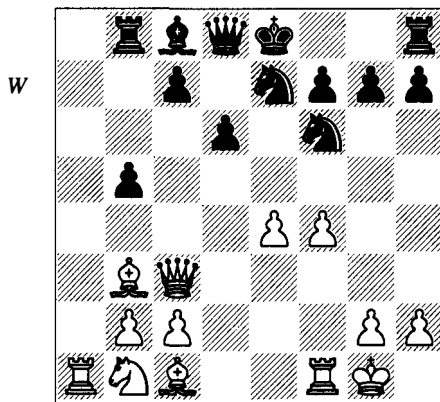
17 f4 g6 18 ♙d2 ♖ag8 19 ♖f3 ♗c8 20 ♖cf1
 ♖g7

With ...♖hg8 and a timely ...gxh5 to come, Black has achieved just enough counterplay versus the h5 bind; he went on to win.

The message of the next opening is pragmatism. This line is all the rage just now; but it's very strange to classical eyes. By move 11, Black has given up the bishop-pair and a-file, and has 'surrendered the centre', all before castling. And yet, his knights and good bishop combine to create enough direct and positional threats to keep him in the game.

Illescas – Shirov*Madrid 1997*

1 e4 e5 2 ♗f3 ♗c6 3 ♙b5 a6 4 ♙a4 ♗f6 5 0-0
 b5 6 ♙b3 ♙c5 7 a4 ♖b8 8 axb5 axb5 9 ♗xe5
 ♗xe5 10 d4 ♙xd4 11 ♙xd4 d6 12 f4 ♗c6 13
 ♙c3 ♗e7 (D)



14 e5

Here the vulnerability of White's centre showed up after 14 ♖a7?! ♙b7 15 f5 0-0 16 ♙g5 ♗xe4 17 ♙e3 ♗xg5 18 ♙xg5 d5 19 f6

♟g6 Ye Jiangchuan-Tkachev, Geneva 1997, and Black's dynamism was demonstrated by 14 ♖d3 0-0 15 ♜c3 c5! 16 ♜xb5 ♜xe4 17 ♖xe4 ♜xb5 18 ♜a7 c4! 19 ♜xc4 d5 20 ♖xe7 dxc4 in Kasparov-Topalov, Novgorod 1997.

14...♜e4 15 ♖e3 ♜c5 16 exd6 ♖xd6 17 ♜e1 ♜xb3 18 cxb3 ♜e6

Black has equalized.

The main-line Ruy Lopez is still being contested, as always. But note how dynamic the following subvariation is, and how extensive and concrete the theory has become (novelty on move 24!).

Kotronias – Gligorić

Yugoslav Team Ch, Nikšić 1997

1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♜b5 a6 4 ♜a4 ♜f6 5 0-0 ♜e7 6 ♜e1 b5 7 ♜b3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 ♜b7 10 d4 ♜e8 11 ♜bd2 h6 12 a4 ♜f8 13 ♜c2 exd4 14 cxd4 ♜b4 15 ♜b1 c5 16 d5 ♜d7 17 ♜a3 c4 18 axb5 axb5 19 ♜d4 ♜xa3 20 bxa3 ♜d3 21 ♜xd3 cxd3 22 ♜e3 ♜c5 23 ♜b2 ♖a5 24 ♜f5!

The first new move!

24...g6

24...♜c8 25 ♜xg7! ♜xg7 26 ♜g3 leads to a winning position.

25 ♜g3 ♜g7

25...b4 26 ♜h5!.

26 ♜xg7 ♜xg7 27 ♜b3 ♖xa3 28 ♜xc5 ♖xc5 29 ♜xd3

and White was able to combine threats against the b-pawn and king with a clear advantage.

D00-D99

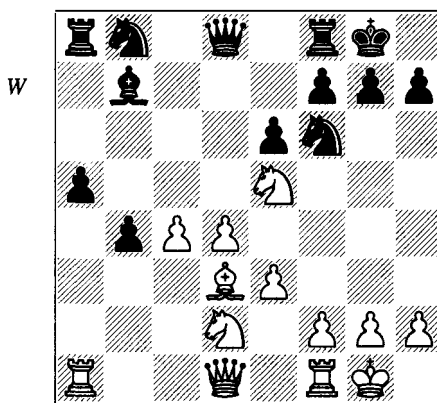
We talked about outside passed pawns in the middlegame and how they could be weaknesses. But the Abrahams/Noteboom Queen's Gambit and variations like the following show that even *connected* passed pawns are not always a match for a strong centre, as in the example we looked at in Part 1, Chapter 3.

Torre – I. Sokolov

Jakarta 1996

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♜f3 dxc4 4 e3 b5 5 a4 e6 6 axb5 cxb5 7 b3 ♜b4+ 8 ♜d2 ♜xd2+ 9 ♜bxd2

a5 10 bxc4 b4 11 ♜e5 ♜f6 12 ♜d3 0-0 13 0-0 ♜b7 (D)



14 f4 ♜bd7 15 ♜c2 ♖c7 16 ♖e1 ♜fd8 17 ♖h4

Black's pawns are blockaded, whereas White has very good attacking chances.

Increasingly, players in dynamic positions keep their kings in the centre and even neglect their development to achieve concrete tactical and positional goals. Here's an example.

Krasenkow – Adianto

Jakarta 1996

1 d4 d5 2 ♜f3 ♜f6 3 c4 dxc4 4 e3 a6 5 ♜xc4 b5 6 ♜d3 ♜b7 7 a4 b4 8 ♜bd2 e6 9 e4 c5 10 e5 ♜d5 11 ♜e4 cxd4 12 ♜g5 ♖d7 13 0-0 h6!?

A new move; previously Black had developed by 13...♜c6.

14 ♜h4 ♜f4 15 ♜c1 ♜c6 16 ♜e1!? b3!

Starting to sacrifice before his pieces are out.

17 ♖xb3 ♜b4 18 ♜f1 ♜d5 19 ♖d1 d3 20 ♖d2 ♜e2+ 21 ♜xe2 ♜xe4 22 ♜d1 ♜f5 23 ♜c4 g5

Still not developing, but he secures protection of the d3-pawn.

24 ♜d4!? ♜g6! 25 ♜g3?

25 ♜f3 ♜d5 26 ♜g3 is better.

25...♜c8!! 26 ♜xb4?! a5! 27 ♜b5 ♖xd4 28 ♖xa5 ♜c5 29 ♖d2 0-0

Black finally gets his king out of the centre, with a clearly winning game!

The next opening features a now-standard pawn-grab by Black in return for bishops and

some weaknesses. It resolves into a position where a strong knight outpost compensates for the bishop-pair.

Yunusov – Vul

Russia 1997

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♖c3 c6 4 e4 dxe4 5 ♗xe4 ♙b4+ 6 ♗d2 ♗xd4 7 ♙xb4 ♗xe4+ 8 ♗e2 ♗a6 9 ♙c3 ♗e7 10 ♙xg7 ♗g8 11 ♗d4 ♗xd4 12 ♙xd4 c5 13 ♙c3 ♗b4 14 ♗d2 b6 15 a3 ♗bc6 16 ♗d1 ♙a6! 17 b3 0-0-0+ 18 ♗c2 ♗xd1 19 ♗xd1 ♗f5

with equality.

Here's a simple and efficient use of the knight-pair and colour complex control to fight against space and bishops:

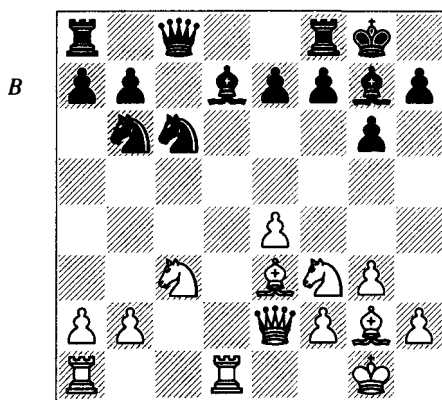
Goldin – Yermolinsky

Orlando 1997

1 d4 ♗f6 2 ♗f3 g6 3 c4 ♙g7 4 g3 d5 5 cxd5 ♗xd5 6 ♙g2 0-0 7 0-0 ♗b6 8 ♗c3 ♗c6 9 d5 ♗a5

Knight on the rim; ho-hum.

10 ♗c2 c6 11 dxc6 ♗xc6 12 ♗d1 ♙f5 13 e4 ♗d7 14 ♗e2!? ♗c8 15 ♙e3 (D)



15...♙e3!

Otherwise 16 ♗ac1 and White has the advantage.

16 bxc3 ♙g4

Threatening ...♗e5.

17 ♗b5 ♗e6

Once c4 is secured, the knights are as good as the bishops.

18 ♗d4 ♗c4 19 ♗db1 ♗xb5! 20 ♗xb5 ♗c4 21 ♙h6 ♗fc8 22 h3 ♙d7 23 ♗d4 1/2-1/2

Positional pawn sacrifices are ubiquitous, and even occur with the queens off:

Van Wely – Svidler

Tilburg 1997

1 d4 ♗f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♗c3 d5 4 ♙f4 ♙g7 5 e3 c5 6 dxc5 ♗a5 7 ♗a4+ ♗xa4 8 ♗xa4 ♙d7 9 ♗c3 ♗e4!

A dynamic move which gives up a pawn for two bishops.

10 ♗xd5 ♗a6 11 f3 ♗exc5 12 0-0-0 e6 13 ♗c7+ ♗xc7 14 ♙xc7 ♗c8 15 ♙d6 b5!

From now on, Black creates threat after threat until the game simplifies.

16 b3 bxc4 17 ♙xc4 ♗a4! 18 ♗d2! ♙b5 19 ♗c2 ♙xc4 20 bxc4 ♗d7 21 c5 ♗c6! 22 ♗e2 1/2-1/2

In view of 22...♗xc5!.

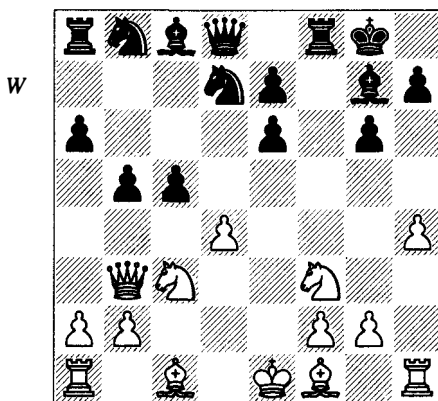
The following game was quite flawed, in hindsight, but illustrates the fight between flank and centre (the flank should have won this time), an exchange sacrifice, and modern dynamism in general.

Lautier – Leko

Tilburg 1997

1 d4 ♗f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♗c3 d5 4 ♗f3 ♙g7 5 ♗b3 dxc4 6 ♗xc4 0-0 7 e4 a6 8 ♗b3 b5 9 e5 ♗fd7 10 h4 c5 11 e6 fxe6?! (D)

It turns out that 11...c4 was correct.



12 h5 cxd4 13 hxc6!

13 ♖xe6+ had been played before.

13...♗c5 14 ♖c2?!

Later, it was found that 14 gxf7+! ♕h8 15 ♗h4! ♜f6 16 ♖d1 eventually would have led to a large advantage after crazy complications.

14...♜xf3!

A defensive exchange sacrifice, reducing White's control of the central squares.

15 gxf7+?

15 gxf3! was correct.

15...♕h8 16 gxf3 d3! 17 ♖d1 ♗c6 18 ♗h6?! ♗xh6 19 ♜xh6 ♗b7 20 ♗g2 ♗e5! 21 ♗h3 ♖d4 22 ♗g3 ♗c4 23 ♕f1 ♜f8

Black's compensation for the exchange is obvious; he went on to win.

The next game has everything: mobile pawn centre, doubled pawns, two bishops versus two knights, a blockade strategy, an exchange sacrifice, and dynamic balance.

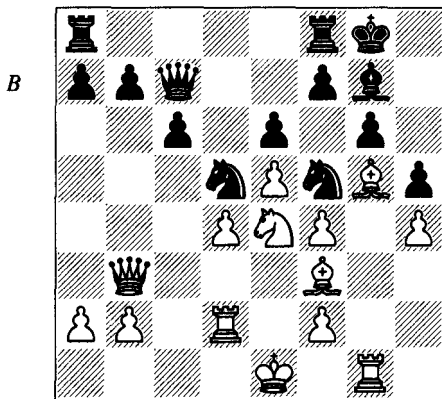
M. Gurevich – Krasenkow

Jakarta 1996

1 d4 ♗f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♗c3 d5 4 ♗f3 ♗g7 5 ♖b3 dxc4 6 ♖xc4 0-0 7 e4 ♗g4 8 ♗e3 ♗fd7 9 ♖b3 ♗b6 10 ♜d1 ♗xf3 11 gxf3 e6 12 h4 ♗c6 13 e5

Black's success in forcing White to advance this pawn allows him to set up a blockade; but White has the two bishops and enemy kingside weaknesses to play against.

13...h5 14 ♗g2 ♗e7 15 ♗g5 ♖d7 16 f4 c6 17 ♗e4 ♖c7 18 ♗f3 ♗bd5 19 ♜d2 ♗f5 20 ♗g1 (D)



20...♜fd8!

A casual modern exchange sacrifice. In such a position, White's dark-squared bishop is obviously worth a rook! However, 20...♕h7 is also fine.

21 ♗xh5!? gxf5 22 ♖f3 ♕f8

22...♖a5 is also possible.

23 ♖xh5

Now, instead of 23...♗de7?? 24 ♖h7! ♗g6 25 ♗f6! with what should have been a decisive attack, Black has 23...♖a5! 24 ♗f6 (24 a3!? ♗xd4) 24...♖xa2 25 ♗g5 ♖a1+ 26 ♜d1 ♖a5+ 27 ♕f1 ♖b5+ with equality. Another example of seemingly irrational attack and counterattack ending in a situation of long-term dynamic balance.

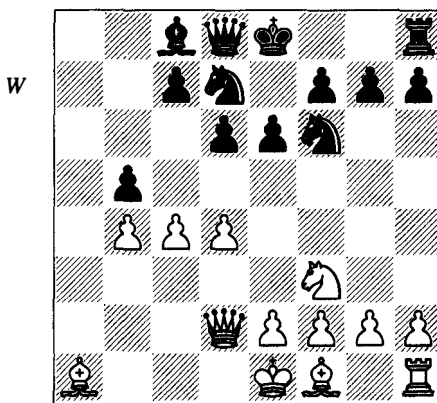
E00-E99

We begin with another positional pawn sacrifice of a variety we have seen in the Nimzo-Indian, for control of a colour complex and paralysis of an opposing pawn-mass.

Shliperman – Yermolinsky

Philadelphia 1997

1 d4 ♗f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♗f3 ♗b4+ 4 ♗bd2 d6 5 a3 ♗xd2+ 6 ♖xd2 ♗bd7 7 b4 a5! 8 ♗b2 axb4 9 axb4 ♜xa1+ 10 ♗xa1 b5! (D)



A remarkable move, which aside from accomplishing the above-stated goals, also develops the queen's bishop with tempo, i.e., the tempo lost by White to react to ...b5.

11 c5

Yermolinsky gives 11 cxb5 ♗b7 12 e3 ♖a8 13 ♖c3 and now 13...♗d5 14 ♖b2 ♗xb4 15

♙e2 ♘c2+ 16 ♚d2 ♘xa1 17 ♜xa1 ♞b8 with equality, or 13...♙xf3 14 gxf3 ♞xf3 15 ♜g1 0-0 16 ♞xc7 ♜a8 17 ♙b2 ♜a2.

11...♙b7 12 e3 ♞a8 13 ♞b2?

Very poor; 13 ♙b2! is correct, when taking the pawn is unclear, so Yermolinsky gives 13...♞a4 14 ♙d3 ♘e4 15 ♙xe4 ♙e4 16 0-0 ♞a8 17 ♜a1 ♞b7 18 ♘e1 as equal.

13...♙xf3 14 gxf3 ♞xf3 15 ♜g1 0-0 16 ♙xb5 ♜a8! 17 ♙f1?

But the position was very bad.

17...♘e4 18 ♜g2 ♘df6 19 cxd6 cxd6 20 b5 ♘d5 21 b6 ♘b4! 0-1

All sorts of pretty mates are about to happen.

So many modern games concern the bishop-pair versus the knights! We've seen some favourable outcomes for the knights above; there follow a couple in which the bishops win out.

Ravi Lanka – Marin

Calcutta 1997

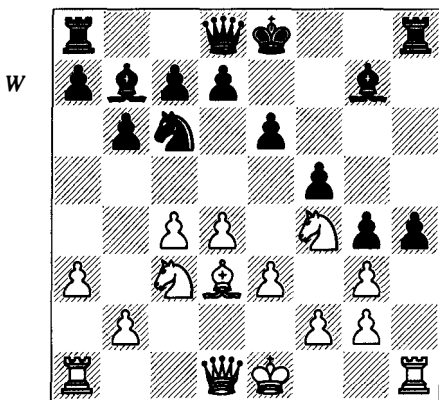
1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 b6 4 ♘c3 ♙b7 5 ♙g5 h6 6 ♙h4 g5 7 ♙g3 ♘h5 8 e3 ♘xg3 9 hxg3 ♙g7 10 ♙d3

The battle lines are drawn; White plays with the centre against Black's two bishops and airy kingside.

10...♘c6 11 a3

11 g4 had been played here, and in view of what happens, grabbing a bit of kingside space would have been a good idea.

11...g4! 12 ♘g1 f5 13 ♘ge2 h5 14 ♘f4 h4! (D)



15 ♞a4

Black's clever point is 15 ♘g6 hxg3!! 16 ♘h8 gxf2+ 17 ♘xf2 ♞f6 with active play and a pawn for the exchange.

15...h3 16 0-0-0 hxg2 17 ♜hg1 ♜h2 18 d5 ♙xc3! 19 bxc3 ♞f6! 20 dxc6 ♞xc3+ 21 ♙c2 ♙xc6 22 ♞b4 ♞xb4 23 axb4

So White is a piece up for two pawns, but after 23...♙f3!, he would have been finished, as he can't oppose the penetration of Black's rooks to h1. After 23...a5, Black was also clearly better and eventually won.

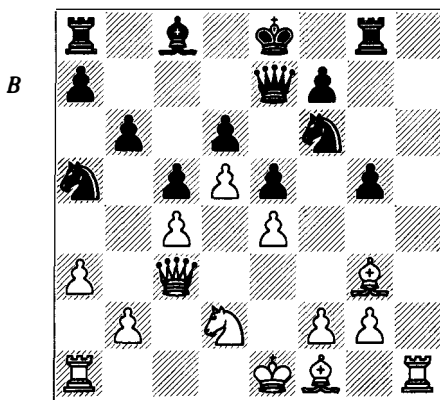
Greenfeld – Solozhenkin

Montecatini Terme 1997

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 b6 4 ♘c3 ♙b4 5 ♞b3 c5 6 ♙g5 ♘c6 7 d5 ♘a5 8 ♞c2 d6 9 a3 ♙xc3+ 10 ♞xc3 e5 11 ♘d2 h6 12 ♙h4 g5 13 ♙g3 ♞e7?

A perfect example of closing the position with the two knights, instead of cracking open lines to establish outposts and space. Black had to try to get ...f5 in, probably by 13...♘h5.

14 h4 ♜g8 15 hxg5 hxg5 16 e4! (D)



Now White is much better: he has space and the h-file, and can slowly open the position after f3, ♙f2, b4, etc., among other plans.

16...♙d7 17 f3 0-0-0 18 b4 ♘b7 19 a4 ♜h8 20 ♜xh8 ♜xh8 21 a5!?

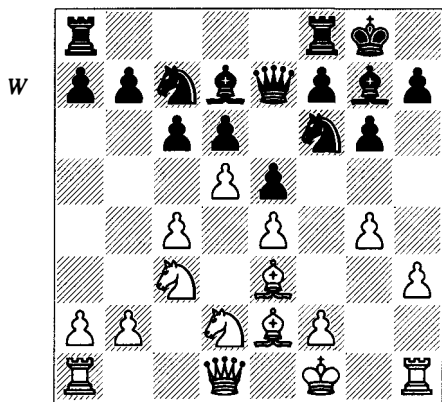
Or 21 ♘b3; the bishops are devastating in such a controlled, semi-closed position.

21...cxb4 22 ♞xb4 bxa5 23 ♜xa5!

Without an exchange sacrifice, it wouldn't be modern chess, right?

23...♘xa5 24 ♞xa5 ♙b8 25 c5 ♜c8

25...dxc5 26 ♘c4.



16 ♖b1 ♜fe8 17 b4 b6 18 bxc5 dxc5 19 a4 ♜d6 20 a5 ♜fb8! 21 g5 ♜ce8 22 h4 f5 23 gxf6 ♜xf6 24 ♜g4

Exchanging the bad bishop, but also contesting the kingside.

24...♜g7 25 ♜xd7 ♜xd7 26 ♜b5! ♜f7!? 27 ♜f3 ♜h5 28 ♜h3 ♜d8!

After all that, the game is still dynamically balanced, e.g., Vilela gives 29 axb6 axb6 30 ♜a1! ♜xa1 31 ♜xa1 ♜xh4 32 ♜a7 ♜g7 33 ♜c7 ♜f6 with mutual prospects.

Typical backward-pawn and outpost themes mark the next contest.

D. Paunović – Ilinčić

Yugoslavia 1997

1 ♜f3 ♜f6 2 c4 g6 3 g3 ♜g7 4 ♜g2 0-0 5 d4 d6 6 0-0 ♜bd7 7 ♜c2 e5 8 ♜d1 ♜e7 9 ♜c3 c6 10 e4 exd4 11 ♜xd4 ♜e5

Black's backward d6-pawn is in the KID tradition of Bronstein and Geller.

12 ♜e2 a6!

But this is typical of today's KID. Black may want to play for ...b5, to target the c4-square and chip away at White's centre; but ...a6 is also useful to prepare ...c5.

13 h3 ♜b8 14 a4

After 14 f4 ♜ed7, Black gets pressure on White's e-pawn.

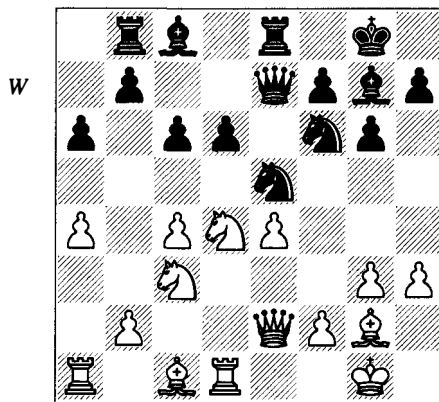
14...♜e8 (D)

15 ♜e3 h5

Also typical, to restrain White's kingside.

16 ♜e1 c5! 17 ♜c2 ♜e6 18 ♜d5

It's a shame to use up the d5 outpost and close the file, but 18 b3 ♜c6 19 ♜ab1 ♜d7! hits



c3 and prepares to establish a knight on d4 or b4.

18...♜xd5 19 cxd5 ♜c8

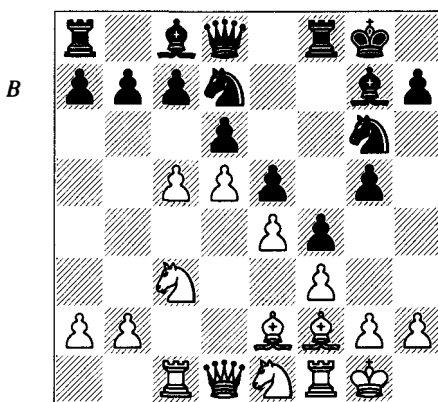
Black is ready for ...b5 and has fully equalized. The ...c5 idea is used routinely these days, but was virtually unknown even in the 1950s and 1960s.

We close with a typical new-age pawn sacrifice in the traditional main lines of the King's Indian:

Piket – Kasparov

Linares 1997

1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♜c3 ♜g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♜f3 0-0 6 ♜e2 e5 7 0-0 ♜c6 8 d5 ♜e7 9 ♜e1 ♜d7 10 ♜e3 f5 11 f3 f4 12 ♜f2 g5 13 ♜c1 ♜g6 14 c5!? (D)



The interesting thing about this positional pawn sacrifice is that White has tried nearly every other legal way of breaking through on the

queenside, and it is usually Black who throws all his pawns away trying to storm the white king. After all these years, White borrows the idea that time is everything in this mutual pawn-storm line, and tries to open lines at all costs.

14...♟xc5 15 b4 ♟a6 16 ♟d3! h5 17 ♟b5 ♟d7 18 a4 ♟h6 19 ♟c3 b6!?

An interesting decision by the champ, who seems to be conceding that White has threats worth watching on the queenside. Piket points out that after the defence 19...♟b8?!, White has 20 ♟a3!, threatening ♟c4-a5 and b5. It's so much easier with the c-file open!

20 ♟e1! ♟f7 21 ♟f2 ♟h4 22 ♟xd6 cxd6 23 ♟xa6 ♟e8! 24 ♟e2!?

Piket likes 24 b5 with the idea ♟b7-c6.

24...g4!

Back to mutual blasting away, but White's a little more advanced than is usual in this variation.

25 fxg4 ♟g7?

Apparently, Black had to try the sacrifice 25...♟xg2!! 26 ♟xg2 hxg4 27 ♟c2 ♟h7! 28 ♟h1 ♟h5 29 ♟g3 fxg3 30 ♟xg3, when things are still unclear.

26 h3 ♟g6 27 ♟b5! ♟xb5 28 axb5 ♟f8 29 ♟d1

White has a clear advantage, which he spoiled in time-pressure; the game was drawn after some wild swings.

The Avant-Garde

Remember that mine is an attempt to describe modern chess as it exists, not as it will be; it would be foolish to try to predict where chess theory is heading. On the one hand, ten years from now, we may all be playing 1 e4 a6! (the St George), 1 c4 g5 (Basman), and 1 e4 ♟f6 2 e5 ♟e4! (Bücker's 'Mokele Mbembe') as if they were today's main-line Najdorfs. On the other hand, as players become strong at ever-younger ages and as chess technique becomes more and more refined, we may run into a deferred Capablanca Variation in which all the 'marginal' openings become essentially unplayable, and the clamour for rule changes reappears following a Leko-Bacrot match with 29 draws out of 30 games. At the moment, neither of these scenarios seems very likely. Our

grandmasters seem able to resist the lure of such bizarre openings; and, despite the computer take-over of our opening notebooks, the number of playable variations is expanding all the time. But who knows?

One thing to consider about the evolution of opening theory is that until now, to my knowledge, almost all radical ideas which entered the mainstream have come from strong players. That is to say, the romantic notion of an underground community of lesser players generating new ideas, which are subsequently accepted by leading players, corresponds to no reality that I am aware of. I am not a chess historian, and forgive me if I'm treading on dangerous, non-expert ground here. But I don't believe that there were persistent advocates for Alekhine's Defence (1 e4 ♟f6) before he used the idea, and didn't Nimzowitsch develop the Nimzo-Indian (1 d4 ♟f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♟c3 ♟b4) and Queen's Indian (1 d4 ♟f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♟f3 b6) without significant historical or outside influence? Similarly, Réti was one of the world's leading players when he developed his system. Some modern Sicilian Defences had older roots, to be sure, but from strong players like Paulsen. The truly radical Najdorf Sicilian and previously-discredited King's Indian were advocated by a series of strong Soviet masters including some of the leading lights of the 1940s and 1950s. Perhaps the Volgograd masters who developed what we in the West call the Benko Gambit (1 d4 ♟f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5) were not leading grandmasters, but they were very strong players. And although the Trompowsky Attack (1 d4 ♟f6 2 ♟g5) only recently came into prominence under the guidance of British grandmasters, Hort, Vaganian and others were playing it in the early 1970s. Arguably, Trompowsky himself (a Brazilian master) was a lower-level source, but it's not as though he had a serious following which ushered 2 ♟g5 into respectability.

Well, I'm sure that there are exceptions to this trend, but if it persists, that doesn't bode well for the fate of truly eccentric new openings such as those mentioned at the beginning of this section, or for the likes of 1 g4 or 1 ♟h3. To be sure, there exists a community of fairly strong 'new-wave' players such as Stefan Bücker, Michael Basman, Gerard Welling, and GM Jonny

Hector who write about and play such things, and a much larger set of lower-level followers. Basman, for example, plays and advocates such things as 1 a3 (and 2 b4), 1 h3 (and 2 g4), 1...a6, and 1...h6. The move 1 g4 (originally a Basman favourite until he found the 'improvement' 1 h3!), has been played by GM Skembris and a few IMs. Furthermore, Jonny Hector has even experimented with some wonderful things like 1 h4!?. But apart from the heady rush provided by Miles's victory over Karpov in Skara 1980 using 1 e4 a6! (a red letter day in new-wave history), there haven't been any 'sightings' in the top-level grandmaster ranks. It will be interesting to see if such ideas ever prove capable of percolating up into the higher ranks.

That said, let's continue our tour through recent *Informators* for a few examples of what's new, if not really bizarre (I have heard that *Informator* editors do not look kindly on the bizarre!). GM Kengis has some sophisticated versions of ...b6 openings which are more 'modern' than the mere Modern Defence, for example:

Lalić – Kengis

European Team Ch, Pula 1997

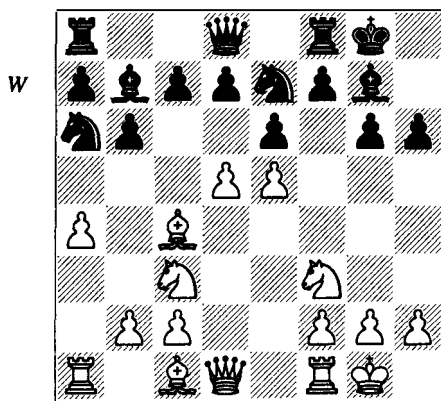
1 ♖f3 b6 2 e4 ♙b7 3 ♘c3 g6 4 d4 ♙g7 5 ♙c4 e6 6 0-0 ♘e7

Completing the second-rank piece-placement!

7 e5 0-0 8 d5 h6 9 a4?!

Versus ...b5, but 9 a3 was better, creating an escape on a2 and retaining control of b4.

9...♘a6! (D)



I don't think Alekhine would be too complimentary about Black's opening!

10 dxe6

This looks bad, but ...♘b4 was going to force it anyway.

10...fxe6!

With the long diagonal and f-file, it's now obvious that Black is doing well.

11 ♖e2 ♘b4 12 ♙d1 ♖e8 13 ♘d4 a6 14 f4 c5! 15 ♘b3 g5!

Two straight pawn moves to the fourth rank! It's typical of the pent-up energy in such positions that White's centre now falls.

16 fxg5 ♙f5 17 gxh6 ♙xe5 18 ♙f4! ♙xf4?

Not 18...♙xf4? 19 ♙xd7!; but according to Kengis, Black maintains the advantage after 18...♘g6! 19 ♙xe5 ♘xe5 20 ♙d3 ♘bxd3.

19 ♖xe5 ♖g6 20 g3 ♙xc4 21 ♙xd7 ♘bc6 22 ♖e2! ♙xc3 23 bxc3 ♙c8 24 ♙d6 ♖xh6 25 a5!

White is better.

Nigel Short is another ...b6-head. Here he employs the English Defence, which is still a bit out on the edge after years of near-respectability.

Gelfand – Short

Novgorod 1997

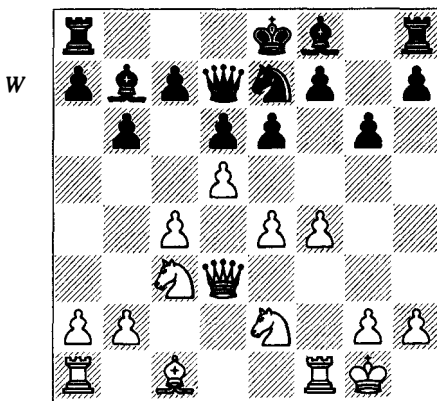
1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 e4 ♙b7 4 ♙d3 ♘c6 5 ♘e2 ♘b4 6 ♘bc3 ♘xd3+ 7 ♖xd3 d6 8 0-0

All 'book' so far!

8...♘e7

Rather like Kengis, Black disdains any development to the third rank.

9 d5! ♖d7 10 f4 g6 (D)



See the last comment!

11 ♘d4?!

White has done well to grab space, but maintaining a massive centre is a tricky business; Short suggested 11 ♖e3 ♗g7 12 ♖d4 with a small advantage.

11...0-0-0! 12 b4?!

Too loose; 12 a4 c5!? 13 dxc6 ♜xc6 is unclear.

12...♗g7 13 b5?

Now who's forgotten the rules of development?

13...♖xd4+! 14 ♜xd4 f5

There goes the neighbourhood!

15 ♖e1 ♜he8 16 ♖b2 fxe4 17 ♜xe4 ♗g8! 18 ♜c3 ♜f7 19 ♖e3?

19 ♖ad1 was not so bad.

19...exd5 20 ♜xd5 ♜xe3 21 ♜xe3 ♖xd5 22 cxd5 ♜xd5

Black has a clear extra passed pawn.

Greek GM Skembris plays funny moves for both White and Black. Of course, one might claim that the following opening is just old hat these days:

Skembris – Begnis

Greece 1997

1 d4 ♜f6 2 ♖g5 ♜e4 3 h4

Ho-hum.

3...d5 4 ♜d2 ♜xg5 5 hxg5 c5 6 dxc5 ♖f5 7 ♜gf3 e6 8 ♜b3 ♜c6 9 e3 ♖e4!?

Black seems disoriented.

10 ♖b5 a6 11 ♖xc6+ bxc6 12 c3 a5 13 ♜d4 ♖xf3 14 gxf3 a4 15 ♜c1! ♜xg5 16 ♜d3 ♖e7 17 0-0-0! ♖f6 18 f4!

White has a small edge due to his control of e5 and the open kingside files. The h4 idea (developed by Hodgson) contradicts older notions about weakening flank advances, but would fit in well with our Part 2, Chapter 3 discussion.

Sometimes the oldest openings are neo-Avant, like this new-wave King's Gambit:

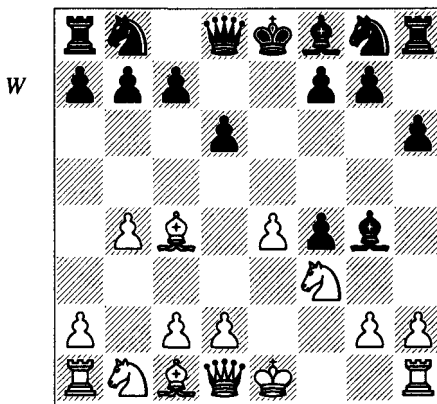
Conquest – Bellin

Amsterdam 1996

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 ♜f3 d6 4 ♖c4 h6 5 b4!?

I'm sure there's some point to this; after all, it had been played before!

5...♖g4!? (D)



5...g5 6 ♖b2 ♜h7 would be truly experimental!

6 0-0 ♜f6 7 ♜c3 ♖e7 8 d4 c6! 9 ♖d3!

9 ♖xf4 d5.

9...♜b6?!

9...g5.

10 ♜e2! g5 11 c4! ♜xb4 12 ♜b1

White has a nice initiative.

It's rather amazing that openings like the next one took so long to catch on. It's not as though White is risking a great deal; one wonders if residual 'knights-before-bishops' dogma had its effect?

Hodgson – I. Sokolov

Groningen 1996

1 d4 d5 2 ♖g5

Preventing ...e6!

2...c5 3 dxc5 f6 4 ♖h4 e5 5 e4 ♖e6?!

This allows a very shaky ending.

6 exd5 ♜xd5 7 ♜xd5 ♖xd5 8 ♜c3 ♖e6 9 ♜b5 ♜a6 10 f4!?

Hodgson gives 10 ♜d6+!? ♖xd6 11 cxd6 with a slight advantage.

10...♖xc5

10...exf4 11 ♜e2!.

11 fxe5 fxe5 12 0-0-0 ♜f6 13 ♜f3

White is obviously better.

This ends our look at contemporary openings. As one can see, they reflect the rule-independence and dynamism of modern chess itself. My hope is that the reader, in a similar way, will relate the ideas in this book to some of the new games which come to his attention.

14 Playing Modern Chess; Conclusion

How does one actually *play* modern chess? As I have said before, this is not an instructional book. But the majority of readers will certainly be players, and players who are looking to improve their game. Having come to an end of this lengthy work, I'm sure that many of you will be saying something along the lines of: "OK, but what do I do when confronted with these issues over the board? It's all well and good to speak of being independent of rules and principles, but what should I then use for guidance?" Looking at Part 2 on a chapter-by-chapter basis, one finds that I have indeed largely defined modern chess in terms of its ambiguities and not its certainties. With respect to pawns, for example, we learned that modern players will often neglect development for structure, allow backward pawns in the opening, move pawns in front of their king, attack the front of a pawn-chain, and advance flank pawns when the central situation is unresolved. On the other hand, they will just as often do the traditional thing (develop quickly, avoid backward pawns, keep kingside pawns on their original squares, etc.). The situation with respect to minor-piece issues is also muddy. We found that bad bishops are often not bad at all, that knights can be strong on the edge of the board, and worst of all, that the knight-pair can be superior to the bishop-pair in either very closed, semi-closed, or wide-open positions! You can successfully grab flank pawns in the opening with your queen when you're staggeringly behind in development; or you can do so and quickly be mated. And so forth when it comes to exchange sacrifices, prophylaxis, etc. Looked at from a distance, this is all not much help, and perhaps a good reason to take up carpentry or writing mystery novels.

But we aren't looking from a distance; we are looking at concrete games and positions. This is the level at which real improvement takes place; you have to develop your intuition and judgement by studying countless actual

situations. I think the frustrated player desiring to achieve mastery has to confront that reality before anything else. Once we accept that general rules are inadequate to lift our play to the next level, the question of what constitutes chess knowledge can be addressed. And here we get some rather surprising answers. 'How-to-improve' chess books may well be able to raise the level of your practical skills or even your rating (although I am sceptical of the degree to which they can do so beyond a certain playing strength). But they won't do much, if anything, for your knowledge of the game itself. Such books can only deal with one side of the equation, for example, thinking techniques, psychological approaches, and sporting considerations (e.g., time management, repertoire choice, and the like). But your knowledge of the interplay of positional and tactical elements, and the paradoxical nuances of initiative and momentum, for example, are a separate and ultimately more important realm.

Let's again see what our friend Suba has to say about this subject: "Most books on 'modern theory' consider that improving one's play by studying strategy means reaching the superior level of a player who has had that instruction. That may be partly true, but I would warn you that the dogma introduced may have a detrimental effect on your creativity. Try to read such books with a critical eye, as if you do not believe a word of what they say. Memorize opening variations, endgame techniques, combinations, ideas, even whole games if you can, but not rules and dogma."

This last sentence is a remarkably honest proposal! After all, it runs counter to the advice of just about every instructional book or magazine article out there! Haven't you seen it time and again: "Don't memorize openings; just learn the 'principles' behind them" ... "you shouldn't be trying to learn by heart; understanding the 'ideas' is what really counts" ... "young players spend too much time learning openings, when

they should be mastering the fundamental principles of the game", and so forth? This advice is given with a straight face by strong grandmasters whose entire time is occupied by (and whose chess upbringing consisted primarily of) studying and memorizing opening variations and whole games! And if this were an endgame book, I could say something less strong but similar: grandmaster authors who for years were drilled and inundated with the *memorization* of specific endings breezily inform their readers that they shouldn't be learning a lot of specific endings by heart, but rather be absorbing fine principles about rooks behind passed pawns and bringing the king into play! Well, as Tisdall absolutely correctly says, rules "gain more general relevance the later the stage of the game they refer to", and therefore I acknowledge that endgame principles are definitely worth paying heed to. But even in that stage of the game, as any prolonged association with grandmasters will teach you, a concrete knowledge-base of countless specific positions both informs those rules and is essential to their correct application.

Think of spoken language. When you speak a language well, you aren't pausing in mid-sentence to think about whether the verb should be active or passive, or how to conjugate it, nor worrying about the case or gender of a noun. Similarly, in chess, the GM doesn't spend much (if any) of his time in a position thinking "is that outpost strong for my knight?" or even "how do I improve the position of my worst piece?". Rather, he already knows how good or bad the knight is there, and automatically takes into account the badly-placed piece. He simultaneously weighs such factors in with a few hundred other considerations, most of which he is familiar with because he has faced similar positions before. Sure, he might occasionally 'step back' from the board and consider general issues, but anyone who has analysed extensively with strong players knows that the concrete possibilities in analysis dominate, with such positional factors being simply imbedded in the play itself, as the rules of grammar are in spoken language. One's real positional understanding increases non-verbally as one refines one's judgement.

When we consider further, the language comparison becomes less precise, but still

useful: for example, grammatical rules almost always apply, whereas chess ones can actually be wrong, or so unreliable as to be worthless. Thus, whereas one can at least imagine learning a language with tolerable fluency simply by applying the rules of grammar, a similarly mechanical application of chess rules would be disastrous. Moreover, even with its better record of accuracy, grammar is learned in practice mainly by example, along with the relevant exceptions. This implies that at the very least, any chess principles should be learned in a realistic context, with attendant ambiguities, and also with plenty of counter-examples. This contrasts with the approach which most chess books take. To quote Suba again: "A game which is a 'model of strategy' is a rare bird between two players of a similar level. Classical strategy presupposes that you play with much weaker (or much stronger!) opponents ... [In the examples given by classical theory,] the side with the disadvantage totally lacks any counterplay, and generally not only the author's but also any other logical plan will win. Today such positions rarely appear, particularly between players of the same strength." In other words, the way we are supposed to learn our general principles (grammar) from such books is not by examining realistic games (sentences as actually spoken), but by being spoon-fed one-sided, unrealistic positions (highly idealized constructions which only confuse us when we later visit the country in which the language is spoken).

So back to the question of how to play modern chess. This book, I repeat, cannot teach you how; but the contrasting examples of concrete play which I've given (if I've done my job well) should help you to get started towards building up a language of modern chess, consisting of its vocabulary, phrases, sentences, conceptual nuances, and *implied* grammar. To the extent that general chess theory helps, it does so because it trains your eye to look for various elements and techniques which constitute such a language, and lends them some unity. Hence, even the relatively abstract discussions I have provided on prophylaxis, dynamism, time, and initiative have been interwoven with examples, and will hopefully direct the reader's thoughts towards recognizing how those elements play out in actual games.

Conclusion

We have arrived at the end of this work, and it's time to look back at what's been accomplished. The primary purpose of this book was to present the ways in which modern chess theory differs from classical theory. What have we found? In Part 1, we concentrated mainly on features of modern play which constituted modest revisions to older thought, for example:

a) new conceptions of development, e.g., an abandonment of the 'move each piece once' principle;

b) a pragmatic materialism, expressed in grabbing flank pawns in the opening;

c) a willingness to take on mobile but vulnerable central pawn-masses;

d) the evolution of minority-attack theory and gradual decline in the importance of pawn majorities and passed pawns in the middle-game;

e) a more sophisticated approach to doubled and tripled pawns which includes willingness to accept them in return for control over key central squares, and new methods of exploiting doubled pawns by dominating colour complexes;

f) a working out of, and pragmatic approach to, isolated queen's pawn positions;

g) increased knowledge of minor-piece trade-offs;

h) a mild evolution of rook play along ranks;

i) exchanges for the sake of colour-complex play.

In Part 2, more definitive theoretical shifts were discussed. Many of these revolved around the general concept of 'rule-independence', whereby the classical edifice of rules and principles is rejected. In almost every case, a pragmatic decision founded in concrete analysis turns out to be preferable to such rules, as shown by these modern tendencies:

a) ignoring development to make purely structural gains, or for prophylactic purposes;

b) happily accepting 'permanently' backward pawns;

c) taking on doubled pawns for dynamic reasons;

d) moving the pawns in front of one's king;

e) developing bishops before knights, or queens before the other pieces;

f) attacking the front of the pawn-chain (as opposed to the base);

g) advancing flank pawns when one's centre isn't secure and/or when one's pieces aren't developed;

h) the almost routine acceptance of 'bad' bishops and knights on the edge of the board;

i) opening the position when one has knights, and stabilizing it when one has bishops.

Those are advances relating to rule-independence. Then there are the broader features of theory and practical play which have characterized modern chess, for example:

a) long-term positional pawn sacrifices;

b) the increasing use of the fianchetto;

c) resolution of bishop-pair issues;

d) new ideas about the worth of knight outposts and superfluous pieces;

e) the ubiquitous exchange sacrifice;

f) completely new handling of the knight-pair versus the bishop-pair;

g) the increasing use of prophylaxis;

h) the tendency to replace 'the accumulation of small advantages' by dynamic play;

i) the use of elastic opening systems;

j) advances in creating asymmetrical positions;

k) depth of opening preparation; and so forth.

I have engaged in other speculative discussions as well (Are queen and knight better than queen and bishop? Is chess a draw? Are rook endings drawish?); but the above lists summarize the type of issues which reflect the primary purpose of the book, i.e., to describe the advances of modern chess. In addition, I hope that I have at least provided the reader with some of the spirit and flavour of today's game. While contemporary play is difficult to get a handle on, it is also more open-ended and creative than during any other age.

That is a good thing. Certainly, it is legitimate to fret over the future effects computers may have on chess; but we should also appreciate the exciting reality we have now. What's more, the creativity which young players are exhibiting today can only broaden and enrich the game further. I am confident that in the coming years, the ideas and trends described in this book will develop in ways none of us could imagine, which is as we would want it to be.

Bibliography

Some day, I would like to do a heavily-commented bibliography, explaining all the strengths and weaknesses of the books I've referred to. Instead, to preserve precious space, let me just point out a few of the books I would consider the most interesting or fun to read in conjunction with my own. First, if you haven't already, you should read Nimzowitsch's *My System*. It is not only a path-breaking work by a great player, but also a humorous book which brings theory to life. I gather that *My System* is a blast to read in German or Danish, if you have either facility. Next, for a truly modern and eccentric point of view as well as a lot of fun, Suba's *Dynamic Chess Strategy* is highly recommended. My first impression of his book was that, apart from the superb games, it was rather exaggerated and superficial. But when I was preparing my own work, I realized that he was perhaps the only writer who had worried about the same topics and come to the same conclusions as I had; and, what's more, he had expressed his views eloquently and humorously.

For the serious student, Dvoretsky's books are deservedly praised and the best thing available for advanced players. I've only mentioned three of his seven books which have appeared in English; *Positional Play* has more to say about the issues I've examined than the others. There is some rather vacuous filler material in parts of this series; but that is more than made up for by its rare originality and wisdom. On a somewhat more basic level, Jeremy Silman's *Reassess Your Chess* is already a classic, and the favourite of students everywhere. For Nimzowitsch fans, Keene's *Reappraisal* has some wonderful gems, and in particular, it covers the period after *Chess Praxis*, which most students know little about. I also strongly recommend Steve Mayer's little-known work *Bishop versus Knight: The Verdict*. It may seem uneven at times, but that is because he is undertaking the rare task of actually writing an original book about an unexplored subject. That is far more difficult than patching together another rehash of old material such as we continually find at the bookseller's table at tournaments. To his great credit, Mayer succeeds in both raising our understanding of minor-piece play and adding to the theory of this subject. Finally, for those who are looking to improve their play or just be entertained (with a lot of philosophy and a taste of theory), Jon Tisdall's recent *Improve Your Chess Now* will delight a wide range of players including, I think, experienced grandmasters.

That said, here is a limited list of the sources most frequently consulted and cited in *Secrets of Modern Chess: Advances Since Nimzowitsch*. I should mention that the Euwe and Kramer book and Pachman's series are the ones so often referred to in the text. I have used them as the leading examples of the traditional middlegame book, with all the limitations that implies; but it also has to be allowed that they are diligent and thoughtful efforts in their own right, and the best of their genre.

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SECRETS

—OF—

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